

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 290.

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 23, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BOY CAVALRY SCOUT; OR, LIFE IN THE SADDLE.

By GEN'L JAS A. GORDON.



Bruno released his hold upon Jaffers and bounded after Ned as he dashed away. Jaffers tried to shoot the dog, but failed, and he shouted to the guerillas: "After him, men! He is Grant's boy cavalry scout!"

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The Boy Cavalry Scout;

OR,

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BY GEN'L JAMES A. GORDON.

CHAPTER I.

THE DESERTER'S PLOT—RACING TO SAVE A UNION ARMY.

The soft, sweet notes of the cavalry bugle sounding "boots and saddles," rang out over the encampment of the cavalry division of the Army of the Potomac.

It was the spring of 1864, and Gen. Grant had been appointed commander-in-chief of the Federal army.

It was suspected among the soldiers that an important movement was contemplated by the great military chieftain, but if such was the fact, the utmost secrecy had been maintained by the commanding officer and his counselors.

No one among the rank and file was able to say with any degree of certitude just what phase of the great campaign was about to be inaugurated.

But because of the fact that orders had been issued for a general inspection of the cavalry brigades when the bugles sounded that May morning, the troopers began to say to each other that some daring raid into the enemy's country was about to be undertaken.

At the same hour, during the inspection of the troopers, a party of six Union scouts entered the camp of Gen. Grant.

Among the scouts rode a man in a tattered, travel-stained suit of Confederate gray. He was young, possessed of a dark Southern face—evidently a rebel soldier, and yet he was not a prisoner.

The Federal scouts, accompanied by the stranger in the uniform of the enemy, rode directly to the headquarters' tent.

Dismounting, the leader lost no time in seeking an audience with the Union general. He was admitted to the presence of the commander as soon as the sentinel on duty at the entrance of the headquarters tent had announced his name.

The manner of the Union scout, as he came into the presence of the general, betrayed that he was laboring under the most intense, repressed excitement.

Gen. Grant and the staff officers saw at once that the scout was evidently the bearer of important, perhaps startling, intelligence.

"Well, what news from between the lines?" asked the com-

mander, as after saluting the scout stood stiffly, waiting permission to speak.

"Beauregard, the rebel general, has fallen back from Welton toward Petersburg. The retreat began just after midnight. The entire Confederate army has been moved rapidly," replied the scout.

Gen. Grant and his officers looked the surprise which this intelligence occasioned them.

"How do you know this? You have not dared to venture as far into the enemy's country as Welton?"

The Union commander spoke with an air of incredulity, which was not unobserved by the scout, who flushed slightly as he answered:

"I have the news from a rebel deserter—an honest man, I am sure, and true to the Union. He was pressed into the Confederate service, but seized the first favorable opportunity to make for our lines. We picked him up on the old Richmond road ten miles south of camp. But he is here to speak for himself if you wish to question him."

"Certainly—by all means. You may retire, but wait at the door with the deserter until I call for him."

"Yes, general," and the scout again saluted and marched out of the tent.

"Gentlemen," said Gen. Grant, when the tent flap had fallen behind the receding form of the scout, "nothing in the way of news of the enemy's movements could please me better than this. As you know, Beauregard, with an army of forty thousand men, has been guarding Welton along with the Petersburg Railroad in Southern Virginia."

There came a chorus of assent from the officers at hand, and Grant continued:

"The Petersburg Railroad, which runs directly from Petersburg to Welton, is the most important one now in the possession of the enemy, for it is the real connecting link between Virginia and the other seaboard States."

The Union commander shot a meaning glance toward the tent door, pausing but for an instant, and then, while the officers drew nearer the camp table at which he was seated, resumed in lower tones:

"You know my plans. In order to prevent Beauregard from

reinforcing Richmond or attacking the Army of the James, I was about to send a strong force of our cavalry riders to strike and destroy the Petersburg Railroad, and thus cut off Beauregard's army."

"And now, general, what change will you make in your plan? Since the enemy has retreated they seem to have deliberately abandoned the Virginia division of the railway to us."

"No time must be lost in getting the cavalry under way. We will strike and destroy the railroad just the same. If we cannot cut Beauregard off from Petersburg, the great rebel supply route shall be destroyed. And now our men can advance boldly, since the enemy has fallen back. But call in the deserter."

An orderly stepped to the tent door in obedience to the request, and returned at once accompanied by the man in Confederate gray, whom we saw arrive with the Union scouts.

"Your name!" said Grant sternly, while he searched the face of the deserter.

"John Hampton, sir," was the ready reply. "I am a deserter from Beauregard's army, but a true Union man, forced for a time to fight under the rebel flag, but anxious to serve the Union."

"So I am told. You have reported the retreat of Beauregard toward Petersburg?"

"Yes, sir."

Gen. Grant went on to question the man at great length. His answers were prompt, and he evinced so much knowledge of the army of the enemy, and spoke so bitterly of his treatment as an impressed Union man in Beauregard's division, that he made an excellent impression.

Grant seemed fully convinced that the man's intelligence was to be relied upon, and when the general had questioned the deserter to his entire satisfaction the latter was allowed to go.

It was understood, however, that he had an important service to immediately perform in the service of the Union.

The deserter had evinced an excellent knowledge of the route between the camp of the army of the Potomac and the line of the Petersburg railroad.

He had agreed to serve as a guide for the Union raiders, and when the deserter left the headquarters tent he was escorted by the scouts to the cavalry camp.

One of Grant's aids accompanied the deserter and the scouts with the general's orders to the cavalry commander to follow the lead of the deserter guide with three thousand of his picked men.

Half an hour later the cavalymen who had so gayly sprang to horse, at the call of "boots and saddles," were riding south, at full speed, with the deserter and a company of a dozen scouts ahead of them.

The dark face of the deserter glowed savagely under the wide brim of his slouched hat. There was a smile of evil triumph upon his saturnine features.

"The plot works. All goes well. The Yankee raiders are doomed. I shall lead them into the jaws of death—into the deadly ambush which Beauregard has set for them. Fools, fools that they are, how readily they credited my story. Too late will come the discovery that they have been decoyed and betrayed," muttered the deserter under his breath.

Meantime, when Grant had sent the fellow, whose monologue has betrayed his real character, to guide the Union troops, the general turned to an orderly and asked in tones of anxiety:

"Is there yet any news of Ned Burton, the boy cavalry scout?"

"No, general, the boy has not yet returned. I fear he has fallen a victim to the rebel bushwhackers, and that he will never come back to bring us the intelligence he went to seek," replied the orderly.

"There is yet a chance that he may come. Perhaps I ought not to have sent the brave boy cavalry scout on such a perilous mission. But he insisted upon going, and, mere boy though he is, he has proved himself a true hero, and more than a match for the rebels in courage and cunning scores of times."

"Yes, general, but never has he gone on such dangerous service as is now the cause of his absence. You several days ago sent Old Kemp, the strange Union sharpshooter scout and spy, to hunt for the rendezvous of Mosby's dreaded rebel guerrillas, who are devastating the country, plundering and murdering the Unionists of Virginia everywhere. The time for Old Kemp's return has long passed, and Ned Burton, the boy cavalry scout, has gone to solve the mystery of his fate, and also seek to discover the stronghold of the guerrillas."

"Heaven grant the noble boy may escape all the perils that may environ him. But he and Old Kemp were devoted friends. The boy assured me the old scout had taught him secret signs and signal marks, such as the Indians employ in the far West, to mark their trails for friends to follow. Ned hoped to find such marks to lead him on the route of the old scout. You know Kemp was a Government scout among the Indians in the West before the war, and he is as crafty and cunning as the redskins themselves. It may be that after all Old Kemp is all right, and merely delaying his return for a purpose to serve the Union in some way."

To this view of the situation, in which the general seemed to find considerable satisfaction, the orderly assented a trifle doubtfully.

Just then there came a sound of commotion at the tent door. This was such an unusual occurrence at headquarters that Grant and his orderly started up from the camp table, at which they were seated.

The next moment, thrusting aside the sentinel, a boy darted breathlessly into the tent.

"Ned Burton!" exclaimed the commander, recognizing the daring boy cavalry scout, about whom he had been conversing.

"Yes, general, I have got back at last," panted the boy. "But tell me, is it true you have sent forward a force of only three thousand men to strike the Petersburg road?"

"Yes, it is true, my boy. You see, Beauregard has retreated, so three thousand men will be a sufficient force to tear up the railroad since they will have no fighting to do," said Gen. Grant, smiling complacently.

"What! Good heavens, general, you have been deceived. Beauregard has not retreated! You have sent the little band of only three thousand men to their doom—to the jaws of death!" fairly shouted the excited boy scout, in intense and thrilling tones of the most positive certainty.

Gen. Grant turned pale.

"Do you know Beauregard has not retreated?"

"Yes, yes, I know it. I swear it. I have been close to the rebel lines. But who brought you the intelligence? Who informed you Beauregard had fallen back?" replied the boy.

"A rebel deserter. One who professed to have been compelled to serve in the Confederate ranks against his will."

"His name?"

"He gave the name of John Hampton."

"Was he a tall, dark, saturnine-looking young man?"

"Why, yes. You have described the deserter."

"I thought so. I know the scoundrel. He is Neal Jaffers, the rebel spy."

"What! Have I been thus duped?"

"Yes, general, yes. Neal Jaffers is leading your cavalry raiders into a deadly ambush."

"You have made some discovery of such a plot of the rebels then?"

"I have. Listen, general, and I will tell you all. A few

hours ago I was hemmed in by rebel guerrillas at Barnard's Mills, three miles from Suffolk. I had left my horse in an adjacent woods; when I entered the town, despite my disguise of a rebel, I fell under suspicion. Discovering that I was being tracked and watched, I hid in an empty house. Crouching in a wide chimney-place, I listened to the conversation of my pursuers, who entered the house. What did I hear? That one of the band who was engaged in the search for me, and whom his comrades called Neal Jaffers, was to make his way to the Union lines and seek to decoy the cavalry into a rebel ambush by means of a false report. Then I obtained a view of Neal Jaffers. From that moment it was my resolve to try to beat the rebel spy to the Union lines, warn you of his coming, and baffle the Confederate's plot."

Ned Burton paused for breath.

"There is a chance that the cavalry force may be saved yet!" cried Gen. Grant, excitedly.

"Orderly!" he added. "See that at once a party of scouts mounted upon the fastest horses in the camp are sent in pursuit of our cavalry to warn them of the danger ahead, and turn them back."

The orderly started for the tent door.

But Ned Burton interposed to detain him, saying, as he did so:

"Hold! Grant me one moment more, general, before you send your aid forth."

"Speak quickly, then, my lad, for now every moment lost may cost precious lives."

"Do not send the scouts in pursuit of the Union cavalry. I have reason to know that outlying bands of Mosby's guerrillas will be concealed along the route. They will not betray their presence to the cavalry, whose force is too great for them, but the scouts will be killed or captured."

"What is to be done then? Those brave men must not go on into the ambush of the rebels. A desperate effort must be made to save them yet."

"General, one rider, mounted on as fleet a horse as can be found in all the South, and experienced as a scout, might dodge the guerrillas, and overtake the Union troopers, while more than one horseman would fail to elude the lurking bushwhackers."

"That is true. But who will undertake this service of deadly peril?"

"I will, general."

"You!"

"Yes, general; I have the fastest running horse in the army—Shooting Star. The old steeplechaser will carry me through the dangerous country if any horse can. Let me go!"

"You shall go. The lives of hundreds—perhaps thousands—are at stake. Dear as you are to me, my noble boy, I will bid you go, and God speed! Now lose not a moment."

"I will not. But one word or two more. I did not find 'Old Kemp,' the missing Union scout. But I did find his trail."

The next moment the boy cavalry scout and the great Union general shook hands at the door of the headquarters tent.

Just without stood a magnificent coal black steed, whose length of limb and perfect symmetrical proportions told of racing blood in his veins.

Ned Burton leaped into the saddle, and waving his hand in farewell salute, gave his horse the rein, and dashed away at wonderful speed.

On, on thundered the noble charger, as if he knew as well as his young rider that he was racing to save a Union army.

CHAPTER II.

THROUGH GUERRILLA AMBUSCADES—THE BOY SCOUT'S LEAP FOR LIFE.

Ned Burton was about seventeen, and as bright, manly, and good-looking a lad as one would wish to see.

He had first joined the army as a drummer boy, but he had soon evinced so much courage that he attracted the attention of "Old Kemp," the trapper scout of the army of the Potomac.

Old Kemp had used his influence, and some months previously Ned had been appointed a cavalry scout to serve with the old trapper.

Since that time the boy had made name and fame, and in the rebel camps many wonderful stories were told of Ned, and he was as much dreaded by the enemy as he was beloved by the Union men.

Ned's mother was a widow in moderate circumstances, residing in Washington, and when she consented to allow Ned to enlist as a drummer boy, she had warned him against one who had been the enemy of the lad's dead father.

That man was Neal Jaffers.

Jaffers had entertained the most bitter hatred against Ned's father, as the boy well knew. But there was no just cause for his enmity. Jaffers, before the outbreak of the war, had fought a duel with a young man who was the bosom friend of Ned's father. The latter had been killed, for Jaffers, like a cowardly assassin, had discharged his pistol before the signal to fire was given. Ned's father had testified against Jaffers when he was brought up for trial, for the former was one of the witnesses of the duel. His evidence had led to Jaffers' conviction. Through political influence the rascal got off with a light sentence, and was soon pardoned.

He had sworn vengeance upon Ned's father.

The latter had been found dead upon a lonely road near Washington ten days after Neal Jaffers' discharge from prison.

Nothing had ever been discovered to connect Neal Jaffers with the crime, and a close investigation seemed to have established that Jaffers was in Richmond at the time of the demise of Ned's father.

The unfortunate man was an army paymaster at the time of his death, which had been occasioned by a bullet wound, and ten thousand dollars in gold which he carried in a leather treasure bag strapped to his saddle was missing. The horse was found in a woods near by, but the money which the dead man had set out to convey to an encampment of the army before Washington, and which was intended to pay the Union soldiers there, had never been found.

On that day of his doom Ned's father was attended only by a large, faithful dog, a mastiff called Bruno. The dog was found seriously wounded in the head, near the body of his dead master, and the indications were that he had engaged in a desperate struggle with the unknown assassin, and got the worst of the encounter.

Ned had carefully attended the wounded dog, and the animal entirely recovered.

When the lad joined the army first he left Bruno at home, but later on, when Ned became a scout, he sent for the dog.

Thereafter the intelligent, well-trained canine had become a valuable assistant to Ned and his comrade, Old Kemp, in their scouting expeditions.

Bruno's keen scent had often given them timely warning of the approach of an enemy, or led them on the trail of a foe which otherwise they would have been unable to find.

Fearing the dog had become so well known to the guerrillas of Virginia that his company had, as a precautionary measure, better be dispensed with on his last scout, Ned had left the animal chained up in camp when he went in search of Old Kemp.

But now, as the daring Union lad was riding away at full speed to save the little army of Union cavalry, he suddenly heard a joyful barking behind him.

Turning in the saddle, to his surprise Ned saw Bruno bounding after him.

The dog had broken his chain, and evidently meant to accompany his young master whether he would or no.

There was no time to turn back with the dog then, the stake of the race in which Ned was engaged was too great to admit of such a delay.

The boy thought, too, that perhaps his faithful dog might, after all, be of service to him, and so, making the best of the situation, he called out to him cheerily:

"Come along, old fellow. Come along if you will, but I'm afraid Shooting Star will leave you behind before long."

After that Bruno came steadily on after the great black horse. The charger had been assigned to Ned from a consignment of horses from Kentucky, and the boy had early discovered that he had probably been a steeplechaser, at least he had proved to be the greatest leaping horse in the Army of the Potomac.

Then, too, since the animal came into the lad's possession he had trained him to such wonderful leaps that now he sometimes cleared such lofty barriers that Ned did not fear to rush him at any obstacle which it was within the bounds of reason to suppose any horse could surmount.

As the young scout had feared, Shooting Star soon left the dog Bruno out of sight in the rear.

But the lad knew the dog would stick to the trail of the horse, no matter where it might lead him, or how great the distance.

The Union cavalry had a considerable start, but Ned counted on the superior speed of his mount to atone for that.

He was soon in the neighborhood where he knew he might anticipate danger. Barnard's Mills—a small hamlet—was about three miles distant.

Beyond this place a sluggish stream of considerable size flows from the adjacent swamp, through a deep ravine, to form a junction with the Nausemond river.

The route the Union cavalry was taking for the railway that was their objective point, would, as Ned knew, lead them through a place which was naturally well fitted for an ambush.

Approaching the ravine mentioned, the road makes an abrupt turn, winds down into the same, and runs along it.

Both banks are lined with timber that could afford concealment for an overwhelming force of the enemy.

The idea took possession of Ned's mind that at this ravine Ned Jaffers had posted the rebels to slaughter the Union cavalry which he was guiding to their doom.

Of all things, therefore, the boy scout desired to overtake the imperilled troopers before they reached the point which he regarded as the one of most imminent danger.

The miles continued to be swiftly counted off under the flying hoofs of Shooting Star for some time.

Still the boy scout, though he strained his glances eagerly ahead, failed to catch sight of the rear guard of the Union troops.

He was drawing nearer and nearer to the perilous ravine, and it seemed to him that his chances of saving the Union cavalry were momentarily decreasing, when, all at once, as he was dashing through a little belt of timber, half a dozen rough looking men, well mounted and armed, rode out into the highway before him.

Ned knew at a glance the men were rebel guerrillas. He was clad in citizen's garb, but he carried a repeating carbine slung at his shoulders, and a pair of cavalry revolvers were in his holsters.

The heroic lad set his teeth determinedly, and without decreasing his speed in the least, or drawing a weapon, he rode right at the horsemen in the road.

To be halted now meant doom for the brave Union men Ned sought to save.

But it was clearly the purpose of the guerrillas to stop him.

"Halt!" shouted the leader of the band in ringing tones, and the rifles of the guerrillas were leveled at Ned.

But he threw himself along one side of his horse, making use of an Indian trick Old Kemp had taught him, and then, as he did not heed the order to halt, a fusillade of rifle balls hurled over the back of his horse.

Ned had "ducked" just in time.

Shooting Star went through the guerrilla band like a flag and thundered on, rounded a bend in the road and left the enemy behind.

Ned heard the sounds of their pursuers, and he urged his horse to make a final spurt.

At the same time he reflected that the report of the guerrillas' rifles must have been heard a long distance ahead, and feared the sound might serve to place other enemies on the alert to intercept him.

The apprehensions of the young scout proved to be well founded.

It seemed the route he had to traverse was destined to become a veritable death guantlet for the brave lad.

He had struck into a long stretch of straight road, fringed here and there by clumps of trees and bushes, and he had just caught sight of the guerrillas he had left behind coming in sight in the distance, when he made a thrilling discovery ahead.

Once more the way was closed against him.

A file of a score of rebel infantry, whose glittering guns and fixed bayonets shone in the sunlight, marched out of a grove of trees a short distance ahead.

From the rear rang out the voice of the leader of the guerrillas, as he shouted in triumphant tones:

"Stop him—he is a Yankee spy!"

At sight of the men he must pass Ned had thought to tempt a ruse, and try to get by them in the character of a Southern citizen and a good rebel.

But the guerrilla's denunciation forestalled this plan of the lad's. It seemed he must now surely fall into the hands of the enemy.

To leave the highway would be to enter the swamp, of which mention has been made, and through which the road now ran. Once in the morass his capture would be a certainty for there his horse could find no secure footing.

The twenty rebel soldiers completely closed the road spreading out from one of the steep banks that bordered it to the other.

The rebels leveled their fixed bayonets, holding their guns in a charge to repel the cavalry.

They were perfectly sure of Ned's capture, and the captain in command of the squad called out to him:

"We've got you now, you infernal young Yank!"

But Ned made no answer.

Instead, with a rousing shout, he rushed his black steed straight at the barricade of living foes and glittering deadly bayonets.

CHAPTER III.

NED AND JAFFERS FACE TO FACE—THE GREATEST PERIL OF ALL.

The boy scout's wonderful leaping horse had again saved him. Shooting Star alighted safely beyond the line of rebels and dashed on.

The amazed and completely surprised Confederates wheeled about and sent a volley of bullets in pursuit of the Union lad as soon as they recovered their presence of mind sufficiently to do so.

But the fusillade went wide of the young scout and his horse, and he continued his rapid flight unharmed.

the infantrymen being on foot were unable to inaugurate an actual pursuit, and again Ned obtained a start while the hunted guerrillas were riding up to the rebel soldiers.

Not more than two miles ahead Ned knew that a bridge had struck off through the woods at the edge of the swamp. He and Old Kemp had previously discovered and traversed the path, finding that it was a short cut leading to the neighborhood of the ravine, where Ned anticipated the rebels were in ambush.

Reaching the entrance of the bridle-path, Ned turned into it, resolved to avail himself of it to decrease the distance to be traversed.

He was soon in the depths of the woods, where, even during the hours of sunlight, the shadows fell gloomily, and the damp, dark thickets bordered the way.

Ned had left the guerrillas out of sight in the rear when he entered the pathway, and he hoped they might pass on along the road without discovering the way he had followed.

Presently Ned caught the sound of discharged firearms in the distance. The detonations emanated from the direction in which he was advancing, and they occasioned him a feeling of consternation. He feared that already the ambushed enemy might have attacked the vanguard of the Union cavalry.

It was exceedingly disheartening to think that after all his heroic struggles in their behalf he was to overtake the Union cavalry too late.

Ned strove to increase the speed of his horse, but the noble animal was already doing his utmost, and he could not further accelerate his pace.

Suddenly the youthful scout drew rein so abruptly that his horse was thrown back upon his haunches.

The sounds of coming horsemen in the path ahead had all once come to Ned's hearing.

It was a question whether the approaching riders were friends or foes, but it would not do to take any chances, and Ned quickly rode aside among the thickets.

The horsemen came on, and catching a glimpse of them, Ned saw they were a band of a dozen rebel scouts. A moment later the boy caught the sound of other men in the timber. He heard signal calls, and answers from several directions, and the alarming conviction came to his mind that scattered companies of the rebel scouts were beating the timber.

The voices of the men on the bridle-path reached his hearing quite distinctly as they rode by.

"I tell you, men, the old Yankee scout in the coonskin cap entered this woods," said one of the Confederates.

"Then we'll run him down yet; the boys are scattered everywhere through the timber. The old Yank can't long escape. Mosby has sworn he shall not reach the Union lines, for he has discovered the great secret of the hidden rendezvous of the Confederate free raiders," replied another of the party.

"Heavens! Mosby's cutthroats have run Old Kemp into the woods, and they are hunting him as if he was a wild beast!" uttered Ned excitedly, for the mention of the fact that the Union scout the guerrillas were pursuing wore a coonskin cap gave the boy the positive assurance of his identity.

Ned began to pick his way along in the timber, keeping near the bridle path. Much valuable time was now lost. Once or twice he narrowly escaped discovery by different bands of Mosby's men, and he had to halt in a thicket more than once.

All at once, as he rode out of a dense forest growth, a startling scene burst upon his vision. In an opening on the bank of a deep dark lagoon of the adjacent swamp he saw a man running as if for life, pursued by eight rebel guerrillas. The fugitive was roughly clad, evidently a man of advanced years, and he wore a coonskin cap.

"Old Kemp!" uttered the boy scout, recognizing his veteran comrade.

The next instant the guerrillas discharged a volley of shots

at the Union fugitive, and with a terrible cry he leaped into the air and plunged headlong down the steep bank into the dark waters of the lagoon.

The guerrillas dashed up and drew rein on the bank of the lagoon. They looked down into the dark waters that had closed over Old Kemp, and Ned heard one of them shout:

"The old Yank is done for. We riddled him with buckshot. I reckon he's at the bottom of the lagoon!"

"Yes, and so Mosby's secret is still safe. The only Yank who ever found his retreat was the old fellow we have shot," replied another.

Then the guerrillas rode on, sending up signal calls to inform their scattered comrades of the fact that the fugitive had been hunted down.

Ned resumed his way sorrowfully, and he mentally vowed that the murder of the old scout should yet be avenged, if his services against them could avail to such an end.

A few moments subsequently the boy heard a crashing sound in the bushes behind him, and whipping out a revolver he wheeled in the saddle, expecting to confront a foe.

But out of the cover bounded Bruno, his faithful dog. The devoted animal had stuck to his trail, and the delays the lad had encountered gave the dog time to overtake him.

The delighted dog frisked and bounded about the black horse, but with a word or two Ned quieted him, and rode onward.

One of his saddle girths became loosened before he had gone but a short distance. Having dismounted in a thicket, he was in the act of buckling the strap, when Bruno gave an alarm by crouching and uttering a fierce, low growl.

"Someone comes," said Ned, mentally.

Peering cautiously through the intervening foliage, he saw a solitary man in a tattered suit of Confederate gray.

Ned drew back, startled and surprised.

The man he had discovered was Neal Jaffers. He was on foot, and seemed to be following a trail.

The ensuing instant Bruno saw the rebel, and while the hair on the animal's neck bristled up and he evinced anger, he made a tremendous leap clear of the thicket. Uttering a terrible howl the animal sprang furiously at Neal Jaffers' throat.

Ned had vainly sought to detain the dog. Never before had the faithful animal thus refused to obey his master. Ned could not understand it.

Neal Jaffers turned pale as death at the sight of the great dog, and while he sought to defend himself against the attack of the infuriated beast, he shouted in tones of mortal dread and terror:

"Merciful Heaven! The dog I thought I left dead on the lonely Washington road!"

Hearing those words, Ned Burton staggered back against a tree as though the weight of the startling discovery he had made caused him to reel.

"At last! at last! I have found out the truth! Neal Jaffers is my father's murderer!" uttered the boy scout, in hollow tones.

He comprehended that the sagacity of the dog had enabled the animal to identify the man who had left him for dead beside his murdered master.

Despite Neal Jaffers' resistance Bruno had fastened his teeth in the rebel assassin's shoulder.

Ned was about to rush forward, but just as he was clear of the timber he stumbled and fell.

Still struggling with the dog, Neal Jaffers saw Ned Burton.

Though to Jaffers' knowledge he and the boy had never met previously, the striking resemblance which the lad bore to his dead father caused a conviction of Ned's identity to instantly flash upon the mind of the assassin. The expression

upon the lad's face had at one glance revealed to the guilty man that Ned suspected his secret of crime.

Neal Jaffers had not as yet, during the struggle with the dog, succeeded in drawing a weapon, but now with a desperate effort he succeeded in jerking a revolver from the holster in his belt where it seemed to have caught.

As Ned regained his feet, Jaffers leveled his weapon in his left hand, and aimed at the boy.

The next instant Jaffers pressed the trigger, but the dog dragged him aside a trifle at the same time, and the bullet whizzed by Ned's head.

He felt the wind of the leaden ball, and leaping behind a tree drew his own weapon.

Just then, as a desperate duel seemed about to be commenced between Ned and his foe, a party of bushwackers came rushing out of the timber beyond Jaffers.

They had been near when the latter discharged his weapon, and the report of his pistol had drawn them hastily to the spot.

At sight of the enemy, Ned rushed for his horse and leaped upon his back, at the same time shouting to the dog to follow.

As if he realized that the odds were now too greatly against him, Bruno released his hold upon Jaffers and bounded after Ned, as he dashed away. Jaffers tried to shoot the dog, but failed, and he shouted to the guerrillas:

"After him, men! He is Grant's boy cavalry scout!"

The ensuing moment Ned was once more riding for his life, hotly pursued.

But he was leaving the guerrillas behind, when, unfortunately, Shooting Star stumbled into a deserted rifle-pit, and, unhorsed by the shock, the young scout was hurled far over the animal's head.

Ned scrambled to his feet immediately. He was pretty well shaken up, but no bones were fractured. The guerrillas were pressing nearer and nearer, and Ned knew that his only chance for escape depended upon his getting his horse out of the rifle-pit in time.

The horse of the young scout was uninjured, and leaping down into the rifle-pit, Ned sought to make him leap out of it. Shooting Star was never in such a situation. The steep banks of the rifle-pit were close around him on all sides. Vainly Ned sought to get the animal out of the trap.

Just then a tremendous volley of musketry rang out from the direction of the ravine some miles ahead. Ned feared the massacre of the Union cavalry had already begun there. A moment and the guerrillas came thundering up to the rifle-pit.

CHAPTER IV.

NED STARTS UPON A DANGEROUS TRAIL.

Ned Burton met the charge of the guerrillas with a volley from his revolvers, while he continued to urge his horse to further efforts to extricate himself from the rifle-pit.

The boy cavalry scout had well nigh abandoned all hope of escape, and how great was his despair we may comprehend, to some extent, when we consider the magnitude of the calamity.

The spirit of innate chivalry and noble heroism that had prompted the Union boy to volunteer for the dangerous duty that had brought him into this deadly peril still inspired him.

Ned yet desired, of all things, to save the Union cavalry, as we know, and as the tremendous volley of musketry rang out from the direction of the defile ahead, where he anticipated the enemy had set their ambush, the lad made a last determined effort to get Shooting Star out of the rifle-pit.

That time the boy was successful.

The steeple-chaser scrambled up the side of the rifle-pit and the succeeding moment, throwing himself alongside the horse, Ned was dashing away at full speed.

Bruno, Ned's faithful dog, followed the headlong flight of Shooting Star and his daring young rider.

The guerrillas sent a shower of bullets hurtling after the fugitive, and Neal Jaffers, the rebel decoy, came running forward shouting excitedly:

"Take him dead or alive, men. He is Grant's boy spy, one of the most dangerous foes of the South. We have for Old Kemp, the Yankee scout, let's make an end of old rascal's boy partner."

The guerrillas were willing and anxious enough to capture Ned without Neal Jaffers' admonition, and they immediately inaugurated a pursuit of the boy.

The latter, however, quickly distanced his foes, and as he bore a charmed life, the bullets whistled around him harmlessly.

In a short time Ned regained the highway which he left, and then he saw a sight that occasioned him the greatest satisfaction.

The road was filled with the Union cavalry. They were pulling back from the ravine beyond Barnard's Mills. Ned joined the force as quickly as possible, and urged his horse toward the rear, whence he heard an irregular firing.

Meeting the colonel in command of the Union force, he hastened to make known the peril of the situation, and to give orders of General Grant for a retreat.

"The advance scouts discovered the enemy in the ravine while we crossed the hills yonder. We made a halt, and the scouts were thrown forward. The deserter guide mysteriously disappeared at the time of the discovery of the enemy," replied the officer.

Only the scouts were now engaged with the rebels, covering the retreat of the Union cavalry. Evidently the Confederates did not, as yet, comprehend that the bluecoats were really began a retreat, or they would have followed them.

"The scouts must be called in. We shall go on the double quick now. Will you carry the order to the rear guard to come back?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, colonel," responded the boy cavalry scout, and a moment subsequently he was again advancing toward the place of greatest danger.

The young cavalry scout reached the men who were covering the retreat of the Union army, and turned them back. Then as Ned himself was riding on the return, he heard the scouts talking of the absence of six men who had been with the false guide, far ahead of all the rest of the Union force.

"Ah," thought the lad, "it must be that Neal Jaffers has thrown those brave boys into a trap. Heaven help them if they are in the hands of the guerrillas."

Just then Ned observed that his dog Bruno was exhibiting certain signs which he could not mistake the meaning of. The boy and the dog had so often followed a rebel trail with Old Kemp, the trapper scout of the Shenandoah, that the lad knew Bruno had struck a trail.

The dog turned off from the road into one of the numerous paths leading into the woods. He came bounding back, uttering urgent barks, and again disappeared. It was the intelligent animal's way of saying to his young master:

"Follow me!"

Ned now heard the clatter of the rebel troops, who were advancing from the defile after the retreating Federals. The last the rebels seemed to have discovered that the Union cavalry were really in full retreat.

"Bruno is doing his best to lead me into the path. I now know the dog's sagacity to be at fault. He'll not guide

an ambush. I'll risk being able to rejoin our cavalry on and follow the dog," said the lad.

disappeared in the forest path which Bruno had entered as the rebel cavalry came in sight down the highway. the brave boy was not seen by the enemy.

"Hello! What's this?" exclaimed Ned, as he caught sight of something white fluttering from a bush beside the path at a distance further on.

On a second glance Ned saw the object which attracted his attention was really a scrap of paper thrust through the sharp leaves of the bush to which it had adhered.

Standing low in the saddle as he reined up his horse, Ned held the paper and found that upon it a few lines of writing had been scribbled in pencil.

Ned gave a start of surprise as he read the communication on the paper.

It ran as follows:

Six Union scouts, myself among the party, have been betrayed into the power of a strong band of Mosby's guerrillas. The deserter sent to guide us. We are being marched toward Mosby's secret camp, as I gather from the bushwhacker there to be put to death in revenge for the death of the guerrilla spies our general had shot in Suffolk last week. If this comes into the hands of any Union man, let him see it reaches the Union commander, that he may know our fate. (Signed) JACK BARTON."

"This is too bad, Jack Barton, and the five companions of mine who have been led into the hands of the vindictive guerrillas are all brave, true men and my comrades. Neal Myers has lured them to their doom," reflected Ned. When suddenly, as if speaking with the inspiration of a second thought:

"But Bruno is on the trail of the captured Unionists. Hal! I have an idea for a great attempt. The scout's note says that Union prisoners are being taken to Mosby's secret retreat. Well, all that's lucky, aided by Bruno, I may be able to trail the guerrillas to the hidden rendezvous of Mosby; I'll try it." A less brave and adventurous spirit might have been deterred from the perilous undertaking. But Ned was a real fighting hero.

He thought, as he rode forward, led by the dog trailer, that he would take any risk to solve the secret of Mosby's hiding-place, and he meant, too, that if circumstances favored him at the least he would try to save the six devoted Union men who were doomed to an unjust fate.

Mosby was the terror of all the Unionists in Virginia, and he had harassed the Union army much by cutting off small supply trains, picking off pickets, and acting as scout and messenger for the enemy.

The Union troopers had chased Mosby's guerrillas a store of times, but the mounted desperadoes had always managed to elude pursuit and disappear with a speed and mystery about their movements that led the Federals to the conclusion that the guerrillas availed themselves of a retreat, the secret of which thus far eluded all the Union scouts.

General Grant wished most ardently to capture Mosby and his band, and some time previously he had offered a large reward for the discovery of the bushwhacker's hiding-place. Ned thought he would be doing the Union cause a great service if he could find the stronghold of the guerrillas.

"I'll do my best," muttered the boy. "The arch villain ordered old Kemp, who, by their own admission, was the only Union man who ever discovered their hiding-place. Neal Myers and his traitor comrades think their secret is buried with my old scout comrade in the dark waters of the swamp. But, God helping me, I will find out the secret and

complete the task of the brave heart who lost his life trying to take back the news to the Union lines."

In silence, but constantly alert and watchful, Ned rode on after that low-voiced monologue expressive of his heroic resolutions.

Bruno was never at fault. Silently the trained dog-scout went on the trail, and he never once gave tongue.

Ned had followed the dog for a distance of some miles when he caught the sound of a rapidly approaching horse. The animal was coming over the route Ned had just traversed.

With a low signal call, the Union lad brought Bruno to his side, and then turning Shooting Star in a cover, he waited the appearance of the coming rider.

He proved to be a young Confederate orderly, as one glance told Ned.

It seemed as though he inadvertently played directly into Ned's hands, for, as he rode by, the Union boy heard him say to himself disconsolately:

"Just my luck. Here the general has sent me off with important dispatches for Mosby, just when we are likely to have a battle with the Yankees, and I might have had a chance to distinguish myself."

"He's my game. I must have those dispatches!" said Ned mentally.

He drew a cavalry revolver, touched his horse with the spur, and the gallant steed, at one leap, bounded out into the pathway before the rebel courier.

"Halt!" shouted Ned, with his revolver leveled at the head of the young orderly.

The latter pulled up instantly.

"I want the dispatches you are carrying to Mosby," demanded Ned.

The courier tried to parley and make denials, but he ended by handing Ned a letter addressed to "Colonel John Mosby," and signed by the Confederate commander, Beauregard.

After that the Union lad compelled the young rebel to dismount, and Ned made some surprising preparations, looking to the great work of rescue and discovery he had resolved upon.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE SECRET RETREAT OF MOSBY'S GUERRILLAS.

In the shadow of the lofty ledge, among the mountains of Virginia, where a view of the surrounding country could be obtained, crouched a roughly-dressed man with a rifle in his hands.

The alert and watchful air of the solitary man on the mountain-side might readily have led to the inference that he was a sentinel on duty.

Such, in truth, was his character.

The faded gray coat and slouched hat and the dark face under it would have served to convey to a most casual observer that he was a Southern man and a Confederate.

It was some hours since the daring boy cavalry scout of the Union army stopped the dispatch-bearer of General Beauregard on the woods trail, down the valley.

All at once the solitary mountain guard raised his rifle and glanced down a steep descent where creeping vines almost hid the trail.

He had caught the sound of hoofs on the rocky way.

"Someone comes! Ah, a messenger from the general," muttered the sentinel.

Through the intervening foliage he had caught sight of a young horseman, clad in the uniform of a rebel orderly or aid.

"Halt!" the command came sternly from the lips of the

mountain sentinel, as a moment subsequently the approaching horseman rode out into full view of him.

The long rifle in the hands of the man in gray was leveled to give force to his command.

"I am a friend. I came from General Beauregard with dispatches for Colonel Mosby," came the answer of the young orderly, but he promptly drew rein.

The speaker was Ned Burton. The boy cavalry scout had come to attempt his daring ruse. He had compelled the rebel orderly to surrender his horse and uniform, as well as his dispatches.

Having left the orderly bound and gagged in a thicket, where he had also secured 'Shooting Star,' still guided by the dog, Ned had continued on.

He did not deem it possible that any of the guerrillas were sufficiently familiar with his personal appearance to recognize his features.

The sentinel scanned the boy scout keenly for a moment, and then he put his fingers to his lips and blew a signal whistle.

In a few moments two men, who resembled the sentinel in general appearance, came in sight further up the steep ascent.

"Here's an orderly from Beauregard with a message. Take him to Colonel John, boys," said the sentinel to his comrades, as they appeared at his signal.

Then, lowering his gun, he stood aside and allowed Ned to ride on. The boy experienced a strange and thrilling sensation, but it was not fear. He knew he was riding into the secret rendezvous of the dreaded guerrilla chief—that he had well-nigh penetrated a secret that had cost many valuable lives.

The situation was one which assuredly might well have caused the bravest—most heroic spirit—some trepidation. It was like riding into the jaws of death.

Detection meant certain doom.

Guided by the two men, whom the guard had called, the Union boy rode up through a rock-bound tunnel. Then there was a sharp descent, and he found himself entering a wooded plateau.

Ned's eyes brightened as he saw that surely, at last, the mysterious hiding-place of the lawless marauders of Virginia was before him.

The lad did not wonder that this eerie mountain rendezvous had so long escaped discovery by the Union men, when he reflected how desirous and well concealed had been the trail leading to it, which only the sagacity of his dog had enabled him to follow.

The tents and rude huts of the bushwhackers were scattered about all over the plateau, and their horses were picketed at its northern end.

To the west the camp was secured against invasion by a steep ledge of rocks which could not be scaled by horsemen, and only perilous climbing could enable a footman to accomplish its ascent.

The great Confederate guerrilla chief was pacing thoughtfully to and fro before his tent, and Ned rode straight up to him and, saluting, said:

"I come from General Beauregard. Here is a dispatch for you, colonel."

Thus speaking the boy placed the dispatches he had taken from the Confederate orderly in Mosby's hands. The latter ordered Ned's horse to be cared for, ordered the latter to be furnished some refreshments, and then deliberately turned to the examination of the dispatches.

The portrait one might naturally have drawn of Mosby from his reputation was not borne out in his actual appearance.

Ned saw a man who at sight would have struck him as being more than ordinary. He was rather smaller than one might

have expected, but full of sinewy strength. His face was pleasant, but there was an air of firmness about it.

Scanning Mosby with the keenest interest while he perused Beauregard's dispatches, Ned began to credit him with qualifications for a leader which had escaped his first glance.

But the ensuing moment the Union boy started as if suddenly made a thrilling discovery.

Just then a young girl had issued forth from a cabin.

At one glance Ned recognized her as an old and a friend of "before the war."

She resided with her widowed father on a fine Virginia plantation, situated in a part of the state yet inside the rebel lines, and her name was Mildred Hastings.

Since the war broke out, Ned had not seen or heard of Mildred directly. But he knew it was reported that the girl and her father were most bitter rebels.

Ned's heart almost stood still as he thought the rebel in the guerrilla camp had recognized him.

He saw that she had positively identified him, as the expression of her beautiful brunette face conveyed the direct intelligence as plainly as words the next instant.

A cold sweat broke out upon Ned's brow.

He could not expect the rebel girl to shield him.

He thought she must now look upon him as a foe—alike of "the hated Yankee mudsills, who had come to despoil the South."

"Merciful heaven! was there ever such an unfortunate accident as this? If that girl speaks I am doomed. If she mentions my name I shall never leave the guerrillas' camp alive," thought Ned.

As the appalling reflection traversed his excited mind, he became aware of the fact that Mosby had raised his eyes from the dispatch and was regarding him keenly.

Ned's heart gave a great leap as he saw Mildred Hastings turn and re-enter the cabin whence she had come, without speaking.

He was completely mystified by the conduct of the girl. He could have sworn she had recognized him. But why, so, why had she not denounced him? He had no time to reflect upon the puzzle.

Mosby, speaking in a stern, imperative manner, immediately addressed him.

"Young man, you appear to be very ill at ease. Let me see, your name is—is—" and Mosby paused as if his memory was at fault.

"Martin Way, sir," replied the boy. "You see, colonel, I have just been appointed one of General Beauregard's aids." "I thought I had never seen you before."

"And I have never had the honor to meet you before, colonel. I came from Greensboro, North Carolina. My father is the late Judge Wallace Way."

Ned's assumption of frankness and sincerity was completely successful. He seemed to have disarmed the suspicion which his unusual manner might have occasioned the guerrilla chief.

"I know the Ways of North Carolina are a true Southern family, my lad, and I am glad to know you," replied Mosby.

Just then one of the guerrilla men came up and said: "Colonel, Brox's band has no got in yet. I'm afraid the Yankees have caught them."

"I hope not. Brox had positive orders to return by more than two hours ago, and I confess it does look as if he is in trouble. But a dozen Yankees shall die for every one of my brave men the Yankees execute."

"Bravo, colonel! But I came also to report that everything is ready for the execution of the six Yankee scouts."

"Very well, lieutenant; march them out to the gallows-tree and call all hands," replied the guerrilla chief.

Ned turned pale as death.

"Oh, am I to fail after all? Is no time or opportunity to

ed me to save these brave men?" thought the Union lad, for he heard Mosby's cold-blooded order.

The next moment he heard a voice, the sound of which gave him the knowledge that he was in imminent peril of meeting the fate of the doomed scouts himself.

CHAPTER VI.

A MOMENT OF SUSPENSE AND PERIL.

The voice which alarmed Ned was that of Neal Jaffers, the spy and decoy of the guerrillas.

Ned saw Jaffers ride into the camp alone, and the villain led his horse straight toward the bushwhacker chief and the boy. The latter turned his head away and drew his gloves, which were smeared with powder, across his face, while he pulled his Confederate hat further down over his eyes.

The appearance of the Union boy was so completely changed that the uniform he wore that Jaffers took him for what he seemed to be, and without bestowing a second glance upon him, said to Mosby hurriedly:

"Brox and his party are in the hands of the Yankees. They have captured up the little band in the wood north of Barnard's farm, and I have had a narrow escape. The Yankees took them before I had quite led them into Beauregard's ambush." "Beauregard has adopted the plan of reprisal by hanging the last of mine he captured inside his lines, and you have come in time to witness my revenge, Jaffers," said Mosby.

"Look yonder!" he added.

Following with their glances the direction which the guerrilla leader indicated the Union boy cavalry scout and the spy saw a thrilling and terrible sight.

A line of a long, rude shed the guerrillas were marching the doomed Union prisoners.

The unfortunate men marched two by two, with their hands chained together.

The boy scout recognized one of the first couples as the author of the message that had served to acquaint him with the capture of the party.

But none of the scouts marching to the ignominious doom, which the merciless guerrillas had decreed for them, recognized Ned, nor did he wish that they should do so.

"That's right. Swing them up. Swing up the infernal Yankees! It serves them right for coming to rob and plunder the South. Yes, give the nigger-worshippers the rope," said Jaffers, in exultation and approval of the verdict of the prisoners' doom.

Some fifty feet from the edge of the precipice, which was the western boundary of the guerrilla camp, stood a forest monarch, whose patriarchal limbs, wide-spreading and numerous, extended in every direction.

Upon this tree more than one poor captive whose only love was his love for the old flag, had met his doom, and now over its limbs dangled six stout ropes, in the end of which was a noose of death.

Everything was in readiness for this awful wholesale execution.

Ned felt that he could do nothing.

He saw the doomed men marched under the several nooses. He witnessed the final preparations of the executioners, and at last he turned away as he thought Mosby was about to give the command to launch the doomed men into eternity.

But a horseman at that most critical moment in the fate of the doomed men came riding swiftly into camp.

"Stop that thar hangin' bee! Stop ther stringin' up! Stop I say!" shouted the new arrival, swinging his hat as he came on.

The man was clad in a well-worn Confederate uniform, and he wore a full beard and moustache. Little more than the eyes were visible in his face, owing to the beard.

"Who are you, and what do you mean by shouting commands in my camp? I am John Mosby, and I am the only one who issues orders here," replied the guerrilla chief.

"Beg your pardon, colonel. I'm King Bittern, of the Tenth Virginia Volunteers, just released from the care o' a Yankee guard and sent to carry ye a message from old Grant. Ye see I was cotched down by the ravine. Here's the message from the Yankee general."

"Now I look at you I see you are King Bittern sure enough. You were a scout of Beauregard's and have been here on business before to-day," said Mosby, while the new arrival handed him a written document. "Hello! Ha! listen to this," cried Mosby, when he had hastily perused the paper.

He read as follows, while the doomed Union men listened as though they believed their lives hung upon his words:

"Headquarters of Gen. U. S. Grant, Commander-in-Chief, U. S. A.

"To John Mosby: Sir—It having come to my knowledge that you have taken six of my scouts, I hereby warn you that I will hang Brox and all his party who are my prisoners, if you fail to treat my men as honorable prisoners of war. If you choose, I will exchange prisoners, man for man.

"(Signed) U. S. GRANT."

"Well, boys, this looks as though the infernal Yankee general was in real earnest. There are twenty men in Brox's party. I can't afford to lose them. March the prisoners back to the shed," ordered Mosby.

Ned felt like shouting.

The doomed men, so suddenly respited, almost broke down under the revulsion of feeling they experienced.

Jaffers walked away with Mosby, and no one seemed for the time to pay any attention to Ned. He was leaning against a great tree at the edge of the camp, when all at once the young girl, Mildred Hastings, came swiftly toward him.

"Ned Burton, I know you. I recognized you when you first entered the camp," said the beautiful Southern girl.

"Would you betray me? Would you doom an old friend of former days to certain death?" replied Ned, knowing a denial of his identity would be useless.

As he spoke he looked into the dark, glowing face beside him, as if seeking to read the very soul of the girl who held his fate in her hands.

She met his searching glance frankly, and said quickly:

"Do you think I could betray you to death? Oh, have you so bad an opinion of me as that?"

"I know you are a rebel. I am an enemy of the South. We are foes. I did not know that I could hope for mercy at your hands."

"Ned," replied the young girl earnestly, "you are wrong. I am heart and soul in sympathy with the North. I love the old flag and the Union!"

"What! But no, you are deceiving me."

"I speak the truth."

"I have always heard that you and your family were the most bitter rebels."

"I can explain that. You know my father's character. How he values his wealth? Well, he has been only acting a part. He has been deceiving the rebels. At heart he and all our family are Unionists. But our property would have been taken from us. Our home would have been destroyed if we had not concealed our real sentiments. Oh, Ned! we are not the only family in this benighted Southern land who dare not reveal our real sentiments."

The young girl spoke in low tones, but there was that in

her manner, as much as in her words, that seemed to convince the boy cavalry scout of her sincerity.

"I believe you, Mildred, and I thank heaven that in you I have found a friend instead of a foe, as I thought," he replied.

"Your friend always," she replied, and she gave him one little hand confidently.

As he held it he asked:

"But what are you doing here—here in the camp of the dreaded rebel guerrillas?"

"Oh, Ned, I am in a terrible situation. It may be you are to help me—to save me from a fate worse than death."

"What do you mean? Why, Mildred, you are trembling from head to foot!"

"Ned, I have a secret to tell you—a strange, dark mystery to reveal. I will trust you—I know you are good and true."

"Yes, Mildred—dear Mildred,"

The girl was about to speak further, when from the shadows in the rear of the great tree that had screened his approach from their sight, Neal Jaffers suddenly leaped out before them.

"I have heard all. I know you now, Ned Burton, you infernal Yankee spy!" cried the rebel.

Ned seemed for a moment to have turned to stone as he stood staring at his father's assassin.

The boy realized that his enemy was triumphant at last.

Mildred, white as death, clung to Ned.

"Lost! Oh, Ned, who will save me now?" uttered the young girl, wailingly.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISGUISED MAN SHOWS HIS HAND.

It seemed that the despairing words of the young Southern maiden, who had just intrusted him with the secret that her sympathies were with the Union, acted as the inspiration for prompt action on Ned's part.

Suddenly he made a tremendous leap, and hurled himself straight at the throat of his vindictive rebel foe.

The lad was swift to comprehend that it was now the one essential of vital importance, that he should prevent Neal Jaffers alarming the guerrilla camp.

One shout from the rebel spy and decoy would now bring all of Mosby's cut-throats down upon Ned.

The only chance for the preservation of the brave lad lay in his preventing the revelation of the secret of his identity, which Jaffers meant now to make known to Mosby and his men.

Neal Jaffers' lips had parted, and the words which he meant should announce to the inmates of the camp that the boy was a Union spy were about to be uttered, when Ned leaped at him.

The hands of the lad fastened upon the throat of Neal Jaffers in a tenacious hold, and the succeeding moment the two were struggling desperately upon the earth.

The trees and intervening bushes screened them from the sight of the main portion of the guerrilla camp, and they were not observed as yet by any of Mosby's men.

Ned exerted all his strength to prevent the utterance of the alarm he dreaded.

Mildred Hastings, pale and terror-stricken, reeled back against a tree, wringing her hands despairingly, as she thought the doom of the brave Union boy was assured.

At that moment of supreme peril Ned Burton wished earnestly for the presence of his dog. But he had left Bruno at the foot of the hill when he caught sight of the guerrilla

picket. The boy knew his wonderful dog would remain—he had left him for any reasonable length of time.

Neal Jaffers was a muscular man, in the full strength of maturity, while Ned, though strong for his years, lacked the muscular development which comes only with the age of years.

The boy cavalry scout soon felt that his strength was failing, and the realization came to his mind like a knell that he had undertaken what he could not accomplish. Neal Jaffers was to become the victor in the terrible hand struggle.

Weaker and weaker grew Ned's efforts, and Neal succeeded in compelling the boy to release his hold upon his throat.

Then the rebel spy could have called assistance, but he no longer cared to do so. Confident that he should almost immediately overpower Ned, and prompted by his vanity at the glory of the lad's capture and unmasking single-handed, he did not utter an alarm.

The end of the unequal contest between the rebel and the boy seemed presently to have come.

Ned was held upon his back, the knee of his foe was pressed upon his breast, and his hands clutched the boy's outstretched arms. While his blazing eyes, scintillating vindictive light, flashed down into the upturned face of the boy scout.

"Conquered—conquered at last, and you shall never see John Mosby's camp alive," uttered Jaffers, fiercely.

Ned was powerless to make a reply. He thought the fiat of destiny had gone forth against him and that so the end would be conducted to the gallows-tree from which the scouts had been reprieved at the last moment.

At the moment of Neal Jaffers' triumph Mildred Hastings turned faint as death, and she would have fallen at the foot of the great tree, where she had stood enthralled by peril, but for the timely aid of a pair of stout arms.

Suddenly a man in the Confederate uniform, who had been watching the scene, stepped out from behind the tree.

He caught the young girl in his arms just as she was falling to the ground. Depositing her gently upon the moss at the foot of the tree, the man crept toward the spy and his boy adversary.

Neal Jaffers' back was now turned toward the great tree whence the man came, and therefore the rebel was ignorant of his approach. Strangely enough, the man in Confederate uniform seemed desirous of taking Jaffers by surprise.

Ned Burton had not yet lost the power of vision, though the dreadful sensation of strangulation he began to experience somewhat blurred his sight.

The lad saw the man in gray stealing up behind Neal Jaffers and wondered at the fellow's conduct, for he was one of his enemy.

Ned recognized the stealthily approaching man. He knew King Bittern—the rebel who had brought the message to General Grant.

"I can hope nothing from that rascal," thought Ned.

But almost the ensuing instant the imperiled boy was amazed and delighted by a mysterious and thrilling proceeding on the part of the fellow called "King Bittern."

The latter, having crept up close behind Jaffers, undetected, suddenly clubbed a revolver which he carried in his hand, and brought it down upon the head of Ned's foe.

The blow sounded with a thud, which told it had fallen with great force upon the skull of Jaffers. He let go his hold upon Ned, and pitched forward upon his face beside the tree. There he remained motionless.

"Knocked ther critter clean out! Redskins an' rattlesnakes! yes! Shouldn't wonder much if I'd cracked his skull."

comes some o' his friends. I'm off with the critter. He can't be seen by the bushwhackers."

The man who had so opportunely felled the rebel spy suddenly lifted the fallen villain in his powerful arms and glided into the bushes with him.

Ned gained his feet and sprang to the side of the fainting girl. He had seen her open her eyes, and gently placed her in a sitting attitude when three guerrillas went by.

The trio scarcely gave Ned and the maiden a second glance. Ned drew a deep breath of relief as the three men passed. He sighted, and he noticed that they had not gone in the direction taken by King Bittern.

Ned's brain was in a whirl.

Ned had felt completely dazed and mystified by the last incident. What can it mean? What is the explanation? Surely the man calling himself King Bittern acted the part of a friend to me, and his voice was that of old Kemp, my dead comrade. He used the ex-trapper's favorite bywords—"Gins an' rattlesnakes," muttered the boy.

A thrilling idea flashed through the mind of the youth. He thought out, and he mentally added:

"It must surely be that old Kemp was not slain by the bushwhackers, who thought they left his dead body at the mouth of the swamp bayou. No, no! I know the old trapper of the Shenandoah too well to be deceived now. Old Kemp lives, and he is here to help me save the Union prisoners in the character of King Bittern."

Ned was convinced that he had solved the mystery of the disappearance of the pretended rebel. The boy's spirits rose at the thought. He felt that the cunning old Indian fighter from the Far West was, of all men, the best fitted to outwit and deceive the guerrillas' mountain cut-throats.

Ned was prompted by the first natural impulse to try to get into the guerrilla camp without further delay. But he contented himself upon second thought that he had best not attempt to do so until he had seen the pretended King Bittern again.

Probably the trapper scout might require his assistance for the rescue of the Union prisoners, whom he had respited by a long respite.

Ned was assured, too, that old Kemp would place it out of Neal Jaffers' power to do any further harm, at least for the present.

Mildred had not witnessed the timely assault upon Neal Jaffers by the man in gray. But Ned hastened to acquaint her with the secret of his deliverance.

"Oh, how happy I am! Now you and your disguised friend can yet rescue me as well as the poor Union prisoner," said Mildred, when she had heard all.

"What! Do you mean you are a captive, too, Mildred?" asked Ned, in surprise.

"Yes, yes. Do you not remember I said I had a secret to tell you? A strange, dark mystery to reveal."

"Oh. True. True. And you were about to explain when Neal Jaffers rushed upon me."

"Yes, Ned. And I will tell you all now. First, let me say to you that I am a prisoner, and I was brought here by Neal Jaffers, who is John Mosby's personal friend."

"Have the rebels then found out that you and your father are Unionists. Have they begun to make you the victims of persecution on that account?"

"No. It is not that. Oh, Ned, you will not believe it, for I have not, despite the proof that Neal Jaffers has shown of the truth of the terrible secret of my life. Can I tell you after this? Can I risk losing your regard?"

Mildred hesitated, and with her hands involuntarily clasped in a gesture of entreaty, looked into his face as if to read his thoughts—as if to see if she could discern therein what in-

fluence the revelation she hesitated to make might exert upon him.

"Say on, Mildred. Nothing can change the opinion I have already formed that you are the best and dearest girl in all the world!" replied Ned, ardently.

Mildred blushed charmingly, and she was about to speak further, when a guerrilla came striding hastily up to the young scout and said:

"The colonel has the answer to Beauregard's dispatches ready. You can be off with them at once if you like, he has sent me to say."

"All right; I'll hasten to the colonel's tent," replied Ned, and when the man had turned away he added to Mildred:

"Now tell me the secret. Hesitate no longer, for I must leave the guerrillas' camp now. To attempt to remain now would arouse suspicion."

"Well, then, Neal Jaffers has the proof that my mother was a slave—that I was born in bondage, and that therefore I, too, am a slave according to Southern law," replied Mildred.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REVELATION OF A VILLAINOUS PLOT.

Ned was dumfounded by the terrible revelation Mildred Hasting had made. He had not anticipated anything of the kind.

But he could not credit the truth of the statement. He thought at once it was all a cruel falsehood invented by the rebel spy for some base purpose.

"It cannot be true. Mildred, what says your father?" Ned cried instantly.

"My father is dead. He died suddenly at our home some weeks since, and by my parent's death I am left all alone in the world, for you know I have neither brother nor sister, and I never knew my mother, who died in my infancy."

"Your father was a man of honor, and I am as sure that you were not born a slave as that the sun is shining," said Ned.

"You make me very happy by saying that. But I have still more to tell you."

"Yes. Let me hear all, and pardon me if I urge you to hasten with the recital."

"After my father's death it was found he was much in debt, and that Neal Jaffers, who was formerly a cotton broker and slave trader, was one of the largest creditors."

"Yes—yes."

"My father left no will, and when his executors had settled the claims against the estate as far as possible there was nothing left for me, and several thousand dollars yet remained due Neal Jaffers."

"Ah! I suspect what is coming now, Mildred."

"Among my father's papers the executors had found a sealed letter addressed to the lawyer who had for years transacted my deceased parent's legal business. The contents of the letter was concealed from me until the affairs of the estate, save the final debt due Neal Jaffers, had been settled; then the letter was read to me by Jaffers. It contained the statement duly sworn to and witnessed by a notary public, that I was the daughter of a slave, and, therefore, a slave myself. That, being childless, my father had bought me of a slave dealer, who assured him my parents were octoroons, and meant always to keep the secret, and that I and all the world should always believe that I was really his daughter. The letter finally directed the lawyer to draw my father's last will, stating that the document should leave everything to me, if there was any inheritance left when all just claims had been settled.

"Mildred paused and Ned said excitedly:

"This is one of Neal Jaffers' plots. The letter must have been a base forgery, of which he is the author."

"My father's executors did not think so. The fatal letter made me a chattel—merely a part of my dead father's estate—to be rated at the sum of money my sale would bring in the slave market."

"Oh, Mildred, do not talk of yourself in that manner. It is terrible!"

"I must tell you all. My father's executors paid the final debt due Neal Jaffers in human flesh and blood. They gave me to Neal Jaffers as a part of my father's estate, valued at so much money."

"Merciful heaven! And according to Southern law you are now Neal Jaffers' slave!"

"Yes, and he brought me to this retreat of the guerrillas until he can carry out a fearful threat he has made."

"What is the threat of which you speak?" asked Ned, his voice trembling with the indignation he felt against the arch scoundrel, whom he believed to have so foully conspired against the orphan girl.

"Neal Jaffers has sworn that if I persist in my refusal to become his wife he will take me to Petersburg and in the slave market sell me to the highest bidder."

"That shall never be! I see it all now. Jaffers has worked out a villainous, well-conceived plot to compel you to become his bride. But I know there is not one drop of negro blood in your veins. One has only to look at you to feel assured of that. Mildred, you shall never live the life of a slave. I pledge you my promise that if the good God only spares my life you shall never go to be sold as a slave in the South. You shall be rescued from this stronghold of your foe."

"I will rely upon you, and, come what may, nothing shall make me consent to accept the suit of Neal Jaffers—the villain who has dared call me a slave!"

Mildred looked as heroic as she was beautiful as she spoke. She had drawn her slender, graceful form erect, and her great flashing dark eyes scintillated with the light of noble resolution.

Ned pressed her hand warmly, saying:

"I honor you for your resolution. And now, dear Mildred, I must go. Goodby. But I hope it may be only a short time before we meet again."

He turned and walked swiftly to the tent of the guerrilla chief. There he received the message Mosby wished to send to the rebel general in reply to the dispatch the boy scout had brought.

Meantime the disguised trapper-scout, old Kemp, was at work undertaking one of the most daring rescues of the whole war.

Having carried Neal Jaffers some distance, he bound and gagged the insensible rebel spy, and secreted him in a thicket, among the mountain ledges.

After that the old Union scout crept away, made a detour, and presently entered the guerrilla camp again, directly in the rear of the rough shed in which the six Union prisoners were confined.

Old Kemp crept through a hole in the rear wall of the shed, which he had previously noted, and so gained the interior of the rude prison-place, without passing a couple of the gray-coated raiders who stood guard at the door.

The six men, still chained two by two, were seated about on the earthen floor. The only light came through a narrow window over the door.

Old Kemp stole forward and one of the prisoners suddenly saw him.

"Hello! you sneaking grayback. Are you coming to knife some of us on the sly?" demanded the Union prisoner who first caught sight of Old Kemp.

"Hist! you durn varmint! Redskins an' rattlesnakes ought to git a pair o' leather spectacles, Jack Barton! We int ye twig the game? I'm old Kemp, the critter that n' you goes agin seseshioners."

Jack Barton knew the voice and the peculiar mount speech. He uttered one exclamation of thanksgiving and ha vent as a prayer, and then he was silent, and with the s other inexperienced men, listened eagerly while the old scou scout went on to say:

"Now then, boys, I'm a-goin' to set ye free."

Working rapidly and using a bunch of keys he had s, a in the guerrilla camp, old Kemp unlocked the chaining bound the men in blue.

When they were all free the scout signaled them to ris him.

He crept through the opening in the rear of the shauerr one after another the six Union men followed him. amp the last one had come safely out of the guerrilla pris Un old Kemp whispered:

"Boys, I've got six good guns hid in the bushes on the ty side o' camp. I got the shootin'-irons from a stack e gu Johnnies' rifles. We'll go fer them weepins, an' then wot got to git out of this down the steep ledge on the wee tr o' the camp. The guerrillas reckon no one kin come ud fi way, an' there's no guard there fer us to pass."

The old scout immediately led the men in the direct g the place where he had secreted the rifles for them. ited

It was at just about that time that Ned Burton was ri it the dispatches for Beauregard from the hands of Mey the guerrilla chief.

"Now, then, young man, you will take these dispatche i mediately to General Beauregard's headquarters," said t guerrilla chief, as he placed a large sealed envelope in ibe hands.

"Very well, sir, I'll be off at once," replied Ned. Then h ing the dispatch carefully in the inside pocket of his coa saluted and turned away.

But the next moment a ringing shout echoed througts camp, and a young man in Union blue, well mounted ant tended by two guerrillas came dashing into camp. de

At one glance Ned recognized the horse bestrode by theke arrival. It was Shooting Star.

"My horse, and ridden by the young Confederate I have! sonated!" said Ned mentally.

Then he made a desperate rush at the new arrival.

At the same instant he whipped out his revolver and re twice. The two guerrillas with the Confederate orderly co

Ned grasped the young orderly, who was unarmed, and i him from the saddle. Then he vaulted into his saddle, wheo Shooting Star like a flash, and sent him at the entrance the trail by which he had entered the guerrillas' strongh

But a score of the mountain band, who had sprang to aut bounded to cut off Ned's escape.

CHAPTER IX.

OLD KEMP AND THE UNION SCOUTS TAKE A HAND.

The boy cavalry scout threw himself along the side of Shn ing Star furthest from the enemy.

Knowing the wonderful leaping power of the gallant s steeple-chaser, the boy was determined again to rely upon t noble steed to carry him by the peril that stood in his way

The twenty rebel guerrillas were evidently intent upon p venting the escape of the Union boy scout.

They had been shouted to by the two escorts of the Con federate orderly, and had they entertained a doubt that Ned v

other than what he seemed or not they had received the positive information that the lad was a Union spy.

The young orderly whom Ned had left bound and gagged in the woods down the valley had succeeded in releasing himself, and mounted upon the lad's horse, which he had found nearby, he had hastened on to the guerrilla camp.

To the sentinel on the mountain-side he had made known the truth.

The latter had come with the rebel orderly into the guerrilla camp accompanied by another one of the guerrilla trail guards, and upon entering the camp he had shouted the alarming information:

"The fellow who professed to be a messenger from Beauregard is really a Union boy spy!"

Ned had not heard this, for he was at the time engaged with the guerrilla chief, and too far removed from the entrance of the camp to catch the remarks of the trail guards.

The Union boy rushed his gallant steeple-chaser straight at the enemies who barred his way.

Twenty rifles were leveled at the daring boy.

The guerrillas could have riddled him with bullets, but they did not do so.

The truth was they thought there was no necessity that they should fire upon the boy. They considered it a certainty that they could stop him and take him alive.

The guerrillas had no knowledge that the Union boy was mounted upon the most wonderful leaping horse in all the South it appeared.

They knew nothing of the remarkable old steeple-chaser which Ned Burton rode.

"Go it, old fellow! We have got to make a leap for life again this time. Up, up! Now forward! Forward for life and liberty!"

As the last words pealed from the lips of the boy cavalry scout he sent Shooting Star at the line of guerrillas.

"Halt! Halt!"

The order sounded in a ringing shout from a score of throats.

But Ned heeded it not. The next moment Shooting Star bounded into the air.

Like a bird the wonderful leaping horse of the Union boy cavalry scout seemed to soar aloft.

Up! up he went grandly, majestically.

But would he clear the line of mountain cut-throats who are intent upon preventing the escape of the brave rider.

The astonished rebels crouched down instinctively, fearing the contact of the iron shod hoofs of the gallant steed.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted Ned as, after a thrilling flight,

Shooting Star alighted safely beyond the lines of the rebels.

Then, while the surprised enemy yet remained victims of astonishment, Ned urged his horse on.

But his escape was not yet assured.

Between two great trees, standing upon opposite sides of the mountain trail, the rebels had rigged a sliding gate which, because it was drawn into the bushes so as to leave the trails open, Ned had failed to see, when he entered the camp.

This rude gate made of oak saplings, spiked to stout cross-pieces, was now drawn. It stood fifteen feet high with sharp points in a close row. A terrible barrier for a horse, even if like the wonderful steeple-chaser, he could make tremendous aerial flights.

As the boy scout caught sight of this barrier closing the path, bounded on each side by the lofty rocks he shuddered. It seemed to Ned that even Shooting Star could not make a leap—could not clear the gate.

But in the desperation of the moment the lad resolved to make the attempt.

With voice and spur he rushed the noble steed straight at the mountain gate.

But the intelligent horse refused to make the jump. With a sagacious instinct the animal seemed to divine that the leap was beyond his power.

He stopped short with a half-human neigh of protest, and Ned thought despairingly as he saw the guerrillas coming on at full speed to capture him.

"After all I am doomed! Where now is my disguised friend?"

The despair of that moment was the most terrible experience of all Ned Burton's eventful life.

But only for a brief space did that dread conviction that his doom was assured fill his perturbed brain.

The ensuing moment a volley of rifle shots rang out behind him.

Wheeling instantly he witnessed a most thrilling and surprising scene.

All at once, out of the cover of the thicket rushed seven men led by old Kemp. Of course the followers of the disguised Union scout were the six prisoners he had liberated.

They had heard the Confederate orderly shout the alarm, and, swiftly making a detour, they had poured a volley of rifle bullets into the ranks of the guerrillas just in time.

Charging forward through the ranks of their enemies who fled, appalled at beholding the prisoners fully armed rushing to assault them, the liberated Union scouts reached the rude mountain gate in less time than is required to record the achievement.

Old Kemp led the van, and when he reached the gate he threw himself from his horse and, bounding forward, drew the bolts and hooks that secured it, and quickly slid it aside.

"Forward, boys! Forward on the jump!" yelled the old Union scout.

Like a whirlwind Ned went through the mountain gateway, followed by the escaping Union prisoners, led by old Kemp.

Down the mountain trail that was the direct course from the camp of the guerrillas, thundered Shooting Star.

On and on behind him raced the escaping Union scouts on foot, while the entire guerrilla camp sprang to arms, and inaugurated a pursuit, well mounted and led by the dreaded Mosby in person.

Down the rugged mountain trail came the gray-coated raiders in a body, numbering more than three hundred men.

Old Kemp glanced back, and the face of the daring veteran of a hundred fierce fights assumed a troubled look.

He knew that the Union lines were miles away, and that the intervening country was infested with foes of the Union cause, who would seek to aid the guerrillas in capturing his party.

But the trapper-scout of General Grant's army meant to make a heroic struggle to reach the Union camp.

To Ned he shouted:

"Never mind us! Oh! On, boy, and let the bluecoats know our situation! Hasten! Redskins an' rattlesnakes! run yer hoss as yer hev never run the critter afore, an' bring some o' Uncle Sam's troopers to the front!"

The next moment the Union scout plunged into the wood beside the trail and disappeared from the sight of Ned and the rebels.

A score of the guerrillas came on after Ned, while the others went in pursuit of Old Kemp's party. The boy scout felt he was engaged in a race for life.

CHAPTER X.

THE READING OF MOSBY'S DISPATCH.

In the midst of the peril and excitement of his flight from the guerrillas' camp, Ned had scarcely time for collected

thought, but despite his personal danger, he was mentally intent upon devising some plan looking to the rescue of Mildred.

The probability now was that the guerrillas would change the location of their encampment, and that even in the event of his soon being able to lead a Union force against them, they would elude him.

Mildred, meanwhile, might be hurried away by Neal Jaffers, Ned thought, for he knew that old Kemp could not have slain the rebel in cold blood, and he considered that the old scout must have left Jaffers near the camp, where in all probability he would ultimately be found by his comrades.

The beautiful face of Mildred was before the mental vision of the boy scout, as he pressed on in his wild race to elude the pursuing guerrillas, and he was resolved to know no rest while she was in the power of the arch villain who had dared to brand her with the debasing name of slave.

Presently Ned neared the cover in which he had left Bruno. A shout brought the faithful dog bounding to his young master, and followed by the animal the lad pressed on.

The speed attained by Shooting Star enabled him to distance his rebel pursuers, and ere long Ned emerged upon the road leading to Barnard's Mills.

The town of Suffolk, to the northward, was the most southern outpost of General Grant's army, and the young scout headed directly for that town.

As he advanced, keeping a vigilant lookout for the enemy, whose scouts he might encounter at any moment, it occurred to Ned to examine the dispatches he had received from Mosby.

Producing the sealed envelope he eagerly opened it, hoping that he might from its contents learn something of importance regarding Beauregard's movements.

Hastily reading the guerrilla's message, Ned uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Then he went over the dispatch carefully.

It ran as follows:

"In Camp on Broadtop Mountain,

May 10, 1864.

"General Beauregard, C. S. A.—Replying to yours just received, I will send the men of my command to guard the railroad bridge on the Nottaway, between Stony Creek and Janette station, as you direct. Please order the next train conveying Union prisoners to Petersburg to stop at the bridge and take on as passengers a friend of mine and a female slave.

"(Signed)

JOHN MOSBY."

Crushing the dispatch in his hand, as he would have liked to crush its author, Ned exclaimed:

"It must be Neal Jaffers has determined to take Mildred to Petersburg at once. But, God willing, I will be at the railway bridge on the Nottaway as soon as the guerrillas.

The lad was about to throw away the dispatch, when it occurred to him he might possibly have further use for it.

Carefully smoothing it out he replaced it in his pocket, but he tore the envelope into bits and threw them into the bushes.

It was fortunate that Ned had retained the dispatch, for he had not ridden half a mile further when a squad of rebel cavalry came down a crossroad and halted where he would have to pass.

The young scout rode boldly up to the Confederates and he was ordered to halt. He obeyed at once, and as he drew rein he shouted:

"I am carrying a dispatch from Colonel Mosby to General Beauregard."

The uniform of the rebel orderly, which he still wore, went far to carry out this assertion. But he was immediately called upon to prove its truth.

"We must see your papers," said the rebel, and then Ned was convinced that his horse was unrecognized.

Producing Mosby's dispatch without a word of protest, Ned handed it to the leader of the cavalry squad, who examined it and seemed fully satisfied that the lad was what he assumed to be.

Apologizing for delaying him, the rebel leader ordered his men aside.

It was fortunate for Ned that the road he was on, though it led north, was the most direct route to a crossroad three miles further on which made a detour along the edge of a swamp and shortened the route to the rebel lines.

But of course Ned did not turn off at the crossroad when he had ridden on.

And the lad was in luck at last, for he came upon a scouting company numbering some four hundred of the First New York cavalry, not three miles from the place where he met the Confederates.

Ned hastened to acquaint the cavalymen with the circumstances which had recently transpired, and the daring Colonel Judson, who was in command of the bluecoats, decided to advance upon the guerrillas.

Riding at full speed, led by the young scout, the troopers in blue made their way into the woods at the foot of Broadtop Mountain, and in a short time they were joined by old Kemp and the escaped Union prisoners. The escaped men were mounted on extra horses of the troopers.

The latter had engaged in a running fight with the guerrillas among the rocks and thickets, but thanks to Old Kemp's skill in woodcraft, they had finally thrown the enemy off the trail.

The site of the guerrillas' camp was soon reached. But no man was found there. Mosby's men had deserted the second stronghold. Taking Mildred with them, old Kemp said:

"I reckon, from some of their mountain lookouts, the graybacks must hev seen us comin' in too strong a force, and cut and run fer it."

"At all events we'll destroy the camp, and the supplies the enemy has left behind them," said the cavalry colonel.

The boys in blue hastened to fire the tents and cabins of the guerrillas, and as the band rode away, the structure which had given shelter to Mosby's mounted robbers were wrapped in flames.

Old Kemp turned aside, and visited the place where he left Neal Jaffers. But the rebel spy was no longer in the thicket. The thongs with which the scout had bound his prisoner lay on the ground, and they had been clean-cut.

"The graybacks found the varmint, and set him free," said old Kemp, holding up the several cords for the inspection of Ned, who had followed him.

The lad assented and then mutual explanations ensued between him and the veteran scout. The latter said:

"I was taken by the guerrillas an' run to the mountain camp. But I gave the rascals the slip. Made a leap for it down the ledge on the west side o' the camp an' run fer it. When I was overtaken on the bayou I saw there was only one chance. I took that chance an' dove into the water, just in time to escape the bullets fired at me. Then I swam under the bushes on the bank, and when the varmints had gone, crawled out an' joined the boys' our army on the retreat from Barnard's mill. Then I heard o' the capture o' Jack Barton an' his party, an' also that our boys hed caught Brox, the guerrilla, and his men. Redskins an' rattlesnakes, I wa'n't long gittin' into the togs o' a reb prisoner of our's, an' one of our boys writ the note I gave Mosby, which purported to come from General Grant. I look enough like King Bittern, the rascal I pretended to be, to pass for him, though I never was glad to see the resemblance until now. You know the rest."

Old Kemp already knew the story of the mysterious murder of Ned's father.

The boy now said:

"I have found my father's assassin at last. The man I have discovered to be the murderer is Neal Jaffers."

Then the young scout went on and related how Bruno—his dead father's dog—had led him to the detection of the assassin, and he further told his eccentric old friend all about Mildred Heath and Jaffers' plan to take her South and sell her as a slave.

Rejoining the cavalry the youth and the veteran of the war continued their conversation, and Ned placed Mosby's dispatch in old Kemp's hands.

"Redskins and rattlesnakes!" cried the old trail hunter when he had read it. "Yer's work mapped out fer us all slick and plain. We'll make a try to foil Neal Jaffers. Durn the varmint. If all goes well we'll snatch the poor Union gal out o' his clutches at the railroad bridge."

"Bravo! I knew you would help me. And, old pard, from this time forth I am resolved to capture Neal Jaffers. I have sworn to bring my father's assassin to justice."

"That's right, boy; that's right! Justice and vengeance! But there will be a great service to the Union cause to be performed at the railway bridge. If ther train filled with our aboys, who are the rebs' prisoners, ain't set free right there we ought to be called in for good!" cried old Kemp.

Colonel Judson, of the cavalry, approved of the daring scheme the boy scout and old Kemp had formed, and which they now hastened to broach to him.

Orders were given to march for the railway bridge.

Night came on while the Union force were en route, and though they were venturing into the enemies' country, and all felt they were taking a desperate risk, the darkness favored them.

At no great distance from the railway bridge, which the Union troopers meant to make the scene of a grand achievement, Ned saw lights flashing about in the windows of an old stone house at some distance from the highway, in the center of a plantation.

The recollection came to the mind of the lad immediately that, before the war, Neal Jaffers had for a time resided there.

"Old pard," said Ned to the veteran, who rode by his side, "it is now after midnight, and yet some one is astir in the old stone mansion yonder in which Neal Jaffers formerly lived. Let's ride down there and investigate. I scarcely dare hope to catch a thing, and yet who knows, Jaffers may have stopped there with Mildred on his way to the railroad bridge."

CHAPTER XI.

THE REBEL'S HIDDEN GOLD.

"Lead on, youngster. We hev' got a leetle the best mounts for our party, and we can overtake the rest, before they reach the railroad, arter visitin' the old stone mansion. But wait a st minute."

As old Kemp spoke he spurred his horse forward, and crained a trooper's side, who rode a little distance ahead. The latter, at the veteran's request, opened an extra knapsack in which he carried and gave the old fellow a package which he took from it.

"Hello! What have you got there?" asked Ned, as old Kemp rejoined him, and they turned their horses in the direction of the old mansion.

"Only some signal rockets. We may need 'em. I told Dean, the rocket man, to look out for signals from us."

"Good. In case we should need help at the old house we can call the boys by sending up a rocket."

"Of course."

They rode in silence until they were near the old house. Then, dismounting, they secreted their animals in a grove and went forward on foot.

The night was sufficiently gloomy to conceal their approach, and they reached the old mansion without noting anything that indicated its inmates had discovered them.

The lights continued to move about in the dwelling, and, gaining a window whence a light emanated, old Kemp and Ned peered within.

They did not see the man they half hoped to find there, but in the room they did see four rough-looking men in the costume of guerrillas.

The men were devouring hardtack and cold meat at a table, and in a moment the spies without caught the following conversation:

"Wonder what Jaffers was so determined to turn aside here for?" said one of the guerrillas.

"I'll wager it's something important," said another.

"Yes, and don't mean to let us into the secret."

"That's so, for he has gone down into the cellar and locked the door behind him, after forbidding any of us to attempt to follow him."

Ned and old Kemp exchanged silent signals.

Then the former whispered:

"This smacks of mystery. We must try to find out what Neal Jaffers is about in the cellar."

"Yes," assented old Kemp, "most of these old Southern houses have an outside cellar door. Let's look and see if we can find one here."

They crept silently and swiftly around to the rear of the house.

In a moment or so they discovered an outside door, covering a short flight of stairs. Opening the door without noise, the two Unionists descended. At the bottom of the flight they were confronted by a second door, but, pushing upon it gently, they were agreeably surprised by its yielding.

Peering through the crack of the door they saw a light in the cellar beyond, and Ned's heart began to beat faster as he beheld Neal Jaffers.

In his mind the rebel spy carried a small lantern, and he was pacing slowly along the rear wall of the cellar, counting thus as he went and touching one of the stones in the wall as he pronounced each numeral.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, here we are, the seventh stone," said Jaffers.

He placed his lantern on the head of a barrel that stood conveniently at hand and, seizing the stone he had passed before, drew it out of its place, an opening behind the wall was then disclosed and from the hidden space Jaffers drew a leather bag.

As he lifted it out of its hiding-place a musical clang of metal striking upon metal came from the bag, and Ned's eyes began to scintillate with excitement and anticipation, as he fancied he had heard the clink of gold.

"Ha, ha! All this Yankee gold shall enrich me, I need no longer fear to use it. The Yankees cannot reach me in Petersburg, and if Mosby keeps his compact with me, Ned Burton will not live to call me to account if the war should end the wrong way," muttered Jaffers.

The boy cavalry scout then knew that the rebel assassin had come to the house to secure his hidden treasure, and in a voice scarcely above a breath, the lad whispered to old Kemp:

"I think the gold in the leather bag must be the money which Neal Jaffers stole from my poor, murdered father."

"Yes, and we must get hold of it," replied old Kemp, in the same low tone that Ned had used.

A further exchange of hurried whispers took place between them. They determined to try to capture the rebel without alarming his comrades upstairs.

Jaffers placed the bag upon the barrel-head beside his lantern, and set about replacing the stone he had taken from the wall.

Ned and old Kemp glided forward.

The rebel's back was turned toward them, and they had almost reached him, undetected, when the lantern globe snapped. The light had been turned too high. Jaffers turned at the sound of the breaking glass.

At that instant Ned's hand was outstretched to seize the bag of gold. As the boy clutched the treasure Jaffers beheld him and old Kemp.

A wild yell of terror and surprise burst from the rebel's throat, and he made a leap for the stairs leading up to the interior of the house. The flight ascended from the rear wall, near which he stood. Like a flash Jaffers darted up the stairs, and as he ran he discharged his revolver.

The bullet whistled by Ned's head, but the boy was unharmed. Old Kemp returned Jaffers' fire, but just as the weapon of the Union scout exploded the villain burst open the door at the head of the stairs and disappeared through it into the room above.

"Quick, Ned! We have got to get out of this!" cried Kemp, rushing for the door through which he and the boy had come.

With the bag of gold in his hand, Ned bounded after the veteran. They were at the foot of the outside flight when both paused, as if in obedience to the same impulse.

The clatter of sabers—the sounds of a body of horsemen in the yard above reached them. A voice at the head of the stairs called out:

"Spread out, boys, and surround the place until we see who's inside. Like enough some of the Yankees are inside. If so, they can't escape John Mosby."

Ned recognized the voice of the dreaded guerrilla chief.

"Hello, boys, you have come just in time. There are a couple of Yankees in the cellar," the next instant Jaffers was heard to shout, as he opened an outside door.

"What, you here, Jaffers?" replied Mosby.

"Yes, as you see, and four of your men are with me. We turned aside from the main band, who went on with the girl, before you came up with the rear guard. The two Yanks must have seen the light in the window and come to investigate. They are the Yankees who outwitted you at the mountain camp."

"We'll have them out and hang them to the nearest tree, or burn the house over their heads," gritted Mosby.

"Upstairs, by the inside flight, with you!" said old Kemp as, a moment later, several of the enemy were heard descending the outer stairs.

Ned, followed by the veteran, rushed up the inside flight and into the room beyond. The apartment was deserted. Old Kemp was at Ned's heels.

"Let's go to the top of the house! It's death to attempt to leave it now," uttered the former.

They gained the second story, and, forcing open a window, while he heard the guerrillas below stairs, old Kemp opened the package containing the signal rockets.

"We got to call the boys! It's our only chance an' a mighty slim one, too," said the old man.

A moment later he set off the rocket, and a globe of redfire went hissing through the window in a skyward flight.

The door of the apartment Ned had closed and secured. But old Kemp opened it as soon as he had set off the rocket.

"Now to the attic. We must gain every moment of respite possible," said he.

Darting up another flight of stairs the hunted Unionists gained the attic. Ned still clung to the bag of gold.

The door through which the pair had come was a stout one and they closed and barricaded it.

Meantime the guerrillas were searching for them.

The house was being ransacked. The enemy had not failed to see the rocket, and they meant to slay the two hated Yankees and be off before help could reach the devoted pair in response to the signal.

Soon the graycoats, with Jaffers and Mosby at their heels, were thundering at the attic door.

But for some moments the door withstood their assault. At last, however, it was dashed inward, driven from its hinges, and the guerrillas surged into the attic. There were yells, fierce imprecations, and the rapid discharge of firearms. No air was filled with powder smoke. The two Unionists were making a gallant fight. The guerrillas had brought a lance with them, but suddenly a bullet from old Kemp's revolver extinguished it, and then darkness enveloped the thrilling scene.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BATTLE AT THE RAILROAD BRIDGE.

As soon as possible the guerrillas relighted the lantern. Its light flashed up and again illuminated the attic, crying of rage and disappointment escaped the lips of Neal Jaffers and Mosby.

The two hunted Unionists had disappeared.

They were no longer in the attic.

"Lost! lost! The gold for which I sold my soul is lost!" cried Neal Jaffers, forgetful of the fact that there were others present.

"What are you talking about? There's no use crying at this. We are outwitted again. Come, to horse, all!" said Mosby.

He looked at Jaffers curiously, and it was evident that he did not know the secret of the treasure which the pair had lost.

"I hardly knew what I was saying. I felt dazed. Come with you to pursue the Yankees," Jaffers forced him to say.

The guerrillas hastily quitted the old mansion.

Mounting their horses they struck off through the plantation in a southerly course, keeping a sharp lookout for the Union couple, but they did not dare separate for a moment, because they knew that Ned and his companion might have friends near or they would not have sent up the rocket.

The escape of the boy scout and his comrade had certainly been a most remarkable one. The lad and old Kemp had darted out of the attic the instant the latter shot out the light.

Fortune had favored them.

Just then the door was not guarded.

Once out of the attic the hunted pair found no obstacle in the way of their escape from the house, and they dashed for their horses at full speed.

They found the animals where they had left them. But

Although Mosby and his bodyguard had ridden by the grove in which the Union horses were they had not discovered the animals.

Before the enemy left the mansion Ned and the veteran were speeding away.

They had not gone far when they met a strong force of guerrillas coming to their assistance in response to the rocket signal.

It was not deemed expedient to pursue the party unless Mosby then, and returning swiftly, on the route they had just traversed, the Union party rejoined the main division of the mounted rifles.

The battle of Spottsylvania Court-House had taken place some days before the date we are now writing about.

During that battle a large number of Union soldiers were captured by the enemy. It was supposed, by the boy scout and his comrade, that the train Mosby wished to stop at the bridge would contain these unfortunate Union men, en route to the rebel prison hells.

But the question was whether or not Mosby would now guard the bridge, and try to place Mildred Hastings and Jaffers on the train, since he knew the dispatch revealing such was his purpose, had fallen into Union hands.

This view of the matter had, of course, presented itself to Ned, and his comrade, at the outset. But they decided Mosby wouldn't let the loss of the dispatch change his plans; because he would not for a moment dream the Yankees would venture so deep into the country held by the rebels as the railway bridge.

Ned and old Kemp agreed to say nothing about the gold they had found. It was United States money, and the property of the Federal Government. They meant to return it in due time to the proper authorities.

The bag's contents was divided. Ned concealed one-half its contents in a knapsack he carried, and old Kemp secreted the other share on his person.

While they thus disposed of the gold, for the present, they fell behind the main band of cavalry.

Old Kemp knew the country, and the Union men had further made sure of a reliable guide, by enlisting the services of an old darky they found in a lone cabin.

The colored man was only too glad to have a chance to guide "Massa Lincum's men," as he called the boys in blue.

At last, while the night remained ordinarily gloomy, the raiders struck the railway.

The point at which they reached the railroad was, perhaps, half a mile west of the bridge over the Nottaway.

In a woods the cavalry halted, and old Kemp, only accompanied by Ned, made a scout toward the bridge. Soon they returned and reported the guerrillas with Neal Jaffers and Mildred Hastings were at the bridge.

By a short route Jaffers and Mosby's bodyguard had gained the bridge ahead of the Union scouts, and found the main guerrilla band already there.

The rebel train from Beauregard's headquarters would come from the west. It was decided the Union men should leave their horses in the care of a few guards and creep up near the bridge.

Knowing Beauregard could not have received his dispatch, Mosby would stop the train by signal, it was thought. But a red lantern was prepared, and a man was chosen to use it in signaling the train to halt, if Mosby should fail to do so.

The man who was intrusted with the signal lantern was an old railroader from the North, well versed in all the signals of railroad men.

Silently the Union men crept nearer and nearer the bridge. At last they halted in the timber but a short distance from the bridge, deploying on both sides of the track.

Then ensued a breathless space of suspenseful anxiety.

But finally the rumble of wheels sounded in the distance; and the shriek of an approaching train was soon heard.

Presently the headlight of a locomotive flashed in the gloom afar, and it came on and on, like a great blazing beacon through the night.

As the train drew nearer and nearer every eye was watching for a signal from the guerrillas. Finally it was discovered that a red lantern was swung in the darkness by one of the guerrillas near the bridge.

On came the train. The shriek of the locomotive sounded "down brakes!" a moment subsequently, and the train began to slow up.

It was seen that the train was made up of five box-freight cars and a caboose. Armed rebels were seated along on the tops of the cars, and there was no doubt in the minds of the Union men that these cars were packed with their comrades.

It had been agreed upon among the Union force that the moment the train stopped, the attack should be made simultaneously upon the guard of the train and the guerrillas.

As the wheels of the engine ceased to revolve, Ned saw Neal Jaffers spring up the steps of the caboose, which was next the engine, with Mildred in his arms.

As the rebel spy disappeared in the caboose with the captive girl the Union men opened fire.

Simultaneously they discharged two volleys—one at the guards of the train, and the other at the guerrillas, and with a cheer the boys in blue charged the latter.

"Forward with the train, engineer! The Yanks are upon us!" shouted Mosby, and while the Union men rushed for the engine its wheels began to move.

The train was starting.

It seemed that the Union men were to fail to save their comrades in the cars, whose doors were secured on the outside, and that Mildred was doomed to reach the slave market in Petersburg.

It was an awful moment for Ned. He had confessed to himself that Mildred was dearer to him than all the world. He resolved to save her or perish.

Ned and old Kemp led the charge for the engine.

"Go fer the gal an' the pizen varmint who is carryin' her off! I'll stop the engine?" cried old Kemp.

He bounded into the cab of the engine with a leveled revolver in his hand, and Ned leaped upon the platform of the caboose.

The speed of the now moving train was rapidly increasing. Ned dashed open the door of the caboose and sprang inside.

As he did so Neal Jaffers, who was crouching just inside the door, leaped upon him.

Ned's revolver exploded, but the bullet went wide and Jaffers was unharmed.

Then, while the train went on and on, faster and faster toward the dreaded rebel prison to which it was bound, a deadly combat ensued between the Union boy and his father's assassin.

It was Ned's horror-stricken thought that old Kemp had failed him. Indeed, he knew it must be so.

The engineer had not been compelled to stop the train.

The thunder of the rapidly revolving wheels sounded like a knell of doom in the ears of the despairing boy.

He heard the rattle of musketry dying away in the distance, and he knew that he was swiftly being carried beyond the reach of his friends.

CHAPTER XIII.

THRILLING WORK ON THE RAIL.

The struggle in which the boy cavalry scout and Neal Jaffers had engaged had carried them near the open door of the caboose.

Suddenly they lurched through it, and upon the platform Ned's foot slipped. Jaffers gave him a push, and he pitched headlong from the now flying train.

A cry of horror went up from a female form, crouching in a corner of the caboose. That utterance of mental agony was the voice of Mildred Hastings.

The Union girl, who had been powerless to assist Ned, be-

cause her hands were bound, believed the heroic lad had been hurled to his doom.

Neal Jaffers bounded back into the caboose and closed the door behind him, with a snarling cry, as he heard Mildred's expression of the intense alarm and solicitude which she was experiencing.

"He'll trouble me no longer. The Yankee must have gone down the steep embankment a hundred feet. I'll wager he has cracked his skull on the jagged rocks," gritted Jaffers.

"Assassin! Murderer! Surely Heaven will yet visit a just punishment upon you!" cried Mildred, in tones of abhorrence.

"Ha, ha, ha! I concern myself only to see that the Yanks do not punish me. By Heavens! It was a daring attempt of theirs to capture the train. But it failed, and we shall take the Yankee prisoners safe to the Southern prisons."

"Judgment will surely overtake you yet. The South will repent this unholy war in sackcloth and ashes, while fire and sword has wrought desolation and death everywhere," said Mildred, in prophetic tones.

"We shall triumph. And now I've a word to say about yourself. Until this night I never really intended to sell you as a slave. All that was a threat to make you consent to be my wife. But now, since I have met with a loss that leaves me penniless, I shall sell you. I must have money."

Mildred had, to a certain extent, schooled herself to contemplate the fate that threatened her with seeming indifference.

She exhibited no marked emotion now, and did not reply to the words of her enemy.

The rebel conspirator seated himself near the girl, and seemed to fall into a reverie, from which he was aroused only by the opening of the car door.

A man in the garb of a rebel captain entered.

"Ah, you boarded the train at the bridge—you were with Mosby's men," said the confederate, addressing Jaffers.

"Yes, and here are my credentials. By the way, captain, how fared the train escort in the skirmish."

Jaffers placed a letter from Mosby in the hands of the officer as he spoke. The latter replied, as he read the message.

"Half the train guards were dropped by the first volley fired by the Yanks. However, as the box cars are all well secured the chances are we have enough men left to guard the train through to Petersburg all right."

"I am at your service if you need me."

"Thanks; your papers prove you are a valuable man to the Confederacy. I am glad you are with us," replied the captain.

He took a seat with Jaffers, and while we leave the two men discussing the war's situation and Mildred bowed down with grief and despair, we will relate what befell old Kemp, and explain how he failed to stop the train.

As the old scout leaped into the cab of the locomotive he leveled his revolver at the head of the rebel engineer, who stood with his hand on the lever and his back to old Kemp.

"Stop this engine, Johnnie!" ordered the old scout. "Reverse that lever or there'll be a dead reb in your boots."

The words had barely escaped the lips of the old scout, when he received a blow on the back of the head from behind that stretched him out at the feet of the engineer senseless.

The rebel fireman was back in the tender behind the coal when old Kemp leaped upon the engine.

The fellow saw his comrade's peril as the Union scout covered him with the revolver.

Observing that the Union man had not seen him, the engineer picked up the heavy iron rake he used for clearing the furnace fire and dealt old Kemp a blow on the head.

So the train sped on.

"Drag the Yank back into the tender. If you ain't sure you

have broken his skull, hit him again!" cried the rebel engineer.

The fireman uttered a threatening oath, and laying hold of old Kemp by the feet, dragged him roughly back among the coal and cinders in the tender.

The Union scout was limp and seemingly lifeless.

"I guess he's done for," said the fireman.

He joined the engineer in the cab then, and the speed of the train was increased.

Throwing the throttle wide open, the engineer said to his companion:

"The Yanks shan't take the train while Dan Koons is at the throttle. It was a close call, but a miss is as good as a make any time."

Half an hour later the fireman went back to the tender to shovel coal into the engine fire.

Then he was surprised and the engineer heard him shout

"By thunder, Dan, he's gone!"

"What! you don't mean the old Yank?"

"Yes, I do. The old fellow I thought I'd laid out fer good ain't in the tender."

"He must have come to and jumped off. It's a pity you didn't make sure of him."

"That's so. But he'll never git back to the Yankee line. He's too far in the rebel country."

While the engineer and fireman were consoling themselves for Old Kemp's escape with this reflection, the Yankee scout heard every word they said, and chuckled to himself.

When he came to his senses and found himself in the tender of the locomotive, the train had gone too far to make any longer advisable for him to attempt to stop it.

The Union cavalry and the bridge where the attack upon the train had been made was now miles in the rear.

Silently the old scout crept back out of the tender, and gained the front platform of the caboose. Looking through the little window in the door of the car he saw Jaffers, Mildred, and the rebel captain in it.

Old Kemp crouched down, and reflected for some moments as to what he had best do. To his mind the rescue of Mildred and the Federal soldiers shut up like cattle in the box-cars of the train, was the all important objects now, as heretofore.

He believed Ned had been left behind. Indeed, the old scout feared the brave lad might have met his death at the hands of Jaffers.

Every moment the train was advancing further and further into the rebel territory, out of which it would be more difficult to escape the more deeply it was penetrated.

Suddenly old Kemp climbed up on the top of the caboose resolved upon a desperate attempt, looking to the rescue of the Union prisoners yet.

He crawled over the roof of the caboose and reached the top of the first box-car. The moon now shed an uncertain light, and as he still wore the uniform of the Confederates, which he had personated King Bittern, he was taken for one of the train guards by a rebel he found on the rear brake.

The voices of the Union prisoners could be heard from inside the box car, and more than one voice shouted:

"Water! For God's sake give us water and let some air to us, or we shall perish!"

It was a warm night, and the sufferings of the Union men packed tightly in the close box car, may be imagined.

"Shut up down there! You'll git water and air when we reach the Confederate city," called out the rebel guard, heartlessly.

Old Kemp heard him jingle a bunch of keys as he moved his position, and muttered:

"The captain gave me the keys to the cars when he was taken. But I shan't take no risks by opening a door."

Yanks might rush on me. If they die in the cars we'll have less of 'em to feed in prison."

Old Kemp's eyes flashed.

He had made a discovery that pleased him immensely.

Creeping cat-like upon the rebel guard, he suddenly dealt the rascal a blow on the skull with his clubbed revolver that stretched him senseless.

In another moment the Union scout had possessed himself of the keys to the box-cars, and he swung the insensible rebel off the train.

Creeping to the edge of the roof, he hung down by one hand, and employed the other to unlock the door of the car.

As he did so he said to the men inside:

"Old Kemp, the Union scout, is about to open the door. Keep still, but be ready to jump when the way is clear."

The next moment the door of the car opened.

"Now, boys, for life and liberty!" said the scout.

The men in blue made a rush and began to leap from the cars.

But at that moment the train shot around a sharp curve into a blaze of light. The rebels on the other cars began to shout and discharge shots at the escaping prisoners. Then there came a volley from the ground.

Old Kemp saw the train had entered a rebel camp.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN PETERSBURG IN DISGUISE.

Dawn was almost at hand, and numerous rebel camp-fires were blazing on each side of the railroad.

Nothing could have been more unfortunate for the Union prisoners Kemp had set free.

Not one of them escaped. Those who were not shot down were driven back into the car from which they had leaped, for the train had been promptly halted as soon as it was seen that the prisoners were leaving it.

Old Kemp was bitterly disappointed.

He comprehended that his own peril was intense.

Acting quickly, he concealed himself upon the trucks under the rear car of the train.

As old Kemp crawled to the place on the train so frequently occupied by tramps attempting to steal a ride, what was his surprise and alarm to find someone already snugly ensconced here.

The succeeding instant the old scout's surprise became complete astonishment, for he recognized the occupant of the space between the trucks under the car.

That personage was Ned Burton, the boy cavalry scout.

"Ned! Redskins an' rattlesnakes! Is it you, boy, or your host?" gasped old Kemp, in a whisper.

"It is I, and I am a very lively ghost. I think, old friend, that Providence must have a special mission for us to perform, for it seems we are destined to accompany Jaffers and Mildred into the heart of the Confederacy," said Ned.

"That's so, maybe. It's mighty queer how things have worked, but Lord bless ye, boy, I'm tickled 'een most 'ter bath to find you all safe an' sound."

"I can say the same of you. But why didn't you make the engineer stop the train?"

Old Kemp hastily explained, and told how he had opened the door of the box car. In conclusion he inquired:

"Now, how came you here?"

"Almost by a miracle. I was hurled from the train by Jaffers and, as good luck would have it, I did not go down the steep bank. The train had not got under full headway, and managed to catch the rear car and jump on the bumper. I

tell you it was sharp work, and I came very near going under the wheels."

"Well, boy, what do you propose now? If we are in luck we may be carried all the way to Petersburg, without being discovered."

"That's so, and that's what I hope for. You know if we were to leave the train, the chances would be against our getting back to the Union lines alive."

"Yes."

"And, besides, I want to go to Petersburg. I am yet resolved to make one final effort there to save Mildred from a fate worse than death. She shall not be sold into slavery if my life even can save her. That pledge I now reiterate."

"You hev got the right sort o' pluck. Redskins an' rattlesnakes, lad, old Kemp will stick to you as long as he has got a button on his togs. I'll tell you what it seems to me our game should now be."

"Good. Let me have your advice."

"Well, we'll try to reach Petersburg undetected on this rebel prison-train. If we do get to the rebel city all right we will find a friend there, ready and willing to help us to disguise. Then, as new characters, I reckon we'll make one more desperate try to snatch the Union gal outen the clutches of her enemies."

"Good. That is the very project I had resolved upon. But tell me, who is the friend you expect to find in Petersburg?"

"A Union man—a cousin o' mine, who hasn't shown his true colors fer fear o' losing his property—like Mildred's father. His name is Ben Dartmore, and if he only had a leetle more true courage he'd be a fust-rate feller."

"Well, this is lucky. You never mentioned to me before that you had a rebel friend in Petersburg."

"That's so. I don't air all I know, even to friends, unless there is some call to do so."

"A good idea. But I tell you, pard, I can hardly keep still here and see those rascally rebs driving our poor boys back into the prison car."

"I'm itchin' ter drop the sight on some o' the varmints myself. But this here are a case where a feller hez got to keep still or go under."

Old Kemp had taken his place beside Ned, and when the prisoners who were not slain had been driven into the car and secured the train again started.

Ned and the old scout breathed easier when the train was presently beyond the rebel encampment, and they had not been discovered.

The run to Petersburg was a perilous one for the two Unionists riding between the wheels. Not only was it a most dangerous experience, but also a very unpleasant one.

The dust and cinders were showered upon the devoted pair. At times they were almost strangled, and more than once they narrowly escaped being joined from their places.

But the terrible journey ended at last.

The train entered the depot in Petersburg, and Ned and his loyal comrade, in their rebel uniforms, crept away unquestioned.

They watched the entrance of the station.

Ere long they saw Jaffers come forth leading Mildred Hastings. The poor girl was the picture of despair, and Ned's heart yearned in sympathy for her sorrow.

Old Kemp and the young cavalry scout stealthily trailed the rebel and his fair prisoner when they left the depot.

The two Unionists saw Neal Jaffers conduct Mildred into a gloomy-looking old mansion upon a retired residence street. Presently the rebel came out alone. The old mansion was surrounded by a high wall, and a villainous looking white man opened the gate to admit Jaffers and his prisoner, and also let the scoundrel out.

Satisfied that they had located the prison place of Mildred, the old scout and his boy companion hastened away.

Old Kemp acted as guide.

He knew something of the city, having visited it before the war, and spent some time with his cousin.

In a short time the Union pair reached the residence of Old Kemp's cousin, Ben Dartmore, the secret Unionist.

Dartmore was at home.

At first, when a colored servant ushered Old Kemp and Ned into his presence, the cousin of the Union scout failed to recognize his relation.

But when the colored man had gone, and the new arrivals were alone with Dartmore, old Kemp hastened to reveal himself, and introduced Ned in his true character.

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed the secret Unionist, springing to the door and locking it, while he began to tremble. "I am sorry you came here. You will be the cause of my being hung for a traitor if you are found out."

"Don't get skeered outin' yer boots, Ben. Durn if I ain't almost ashamed to acknowledge ye for a cousin. You rest easy. No matter what may happen to us, we shall bring no trouble on you," said old Kemp.

"But you must help us," Ned hastened to add.

"I would like to do so, but I dassent."

"You have got to! I know that you are Union to the backbone, but an infernal coward. You could get us some new clothes, citizen's dresses, such as I shall describe, and some traps for disguising our faces," continued old Kemp.

"Yes, I might do that. I will do it if you will promise to go then, and not come near me again."

"All right. Now I'll tell you exactly what we want," replied the old scout.

Hastily then he enumerated the articles of clothing and other things which he required.

Leaving the two Unionists in an upper room of the house to which he conducted them immediately, Dartmore went to procure the clothing and other things old Kemp had named.

In less than an hour he returned, laden with everything the Unionists required, and very soon after that the boy cavalry scout and his old friend were transformed.

Old Kemp was artistically made up as an old Southern planter. Ned was also dressed in planter costume, similar to that worn by Kemp. Both carried small tourists' handbags.

Facially they were completely metamorphosed by means of coloring matter, and in Ned's case by the addition of a fierce mustache and goatee, which made him look ten years older.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE REBEL SLAVE MARKET.

"The Johnnies won't suspect us from our appearance anyhow. We can feel sure of that, I reckon," said old Kemp, in satisfied tones, as he and the boy cavalry scout surveyed themselves in the full length mirror of the apartment in which they had made their disguise.

Ned assented and Old Kemp continued:

"Now, boy, you know General Grant would jist give most anything in the world fer accurate information regarding the fortifications of this town an' the strength of the rebels here."

"Yes."

"Well, we can't do anything looking to the rescue of the Union gal until night, and even then we can only attempt to communicate with her an' fix things fer a future attempt."

"True."

"So I propose to go on a scout now."

"About the city?"

"Yes; we're planters from down country—rank rebs—come to see friends here. You're my son—Garrison Peyton. I'm Jeff Peyton. You understand?"

"Quite so," replied Ned, smiling.

"Then here we go."

Much to the relief of Ben Dartmore, Old Kemp led way from the house, and Ned followed him.

They sauntered about the city and walked among the fortifications unquestioned.

Mentally they made note of everything they saw and heard, and the discoveries that came in their way were most important ones.

They found that the fortifications of Petersburg were nearly as formidable as the Union commander supposed. There was a scarcity of cannon among the rebels, and most of the great siege guns that seemed to grow from the earth. The works about the city were really only tree-trunks set up to represent cannon and painted black.

The forces of Confederates in the works were far less numerous than General Grant thought, and old Kemp said:

"If we ever get back to the Union lines alive we'll hev news fer the ginerel. Redskins an' rattlesnakes, yes!"

Toward night old Kemp and Ned returned to the heart of the city.

They were in a little restaurant on Main street when they heard two men conversing near them, at a table adjoining one at which they were seated.

The parties in question were well dressed in citizens' attire and looked like persons of wealth. Both were of more than middle age, and swarthy, as though all their lives had been spent under southern skies.

"Yes, Bramble," one of the men was saying, when Ned caught his words, "there is to be a private auction at Grendell's slave market to-night."

"What do you mean by a private auction, Deedly?" asked the companion of the first speaker.

"Why, you must know, since the city was placed under martial law public slave sales have been discontinued. But the trade goes on all the same. Cards of admission are sent by the slave dealer to such parties as he thinks likely to come customers."

"Oh, I understand. And I suppose you mean to attend the sale of slaves to-night. You said you were on the lookout for a couple of house servants."

"Yes, I shall attend the sale, and as I have cards for you you can go with me if you like. I tell you there is one to be sold to-night who is as white as you or I, and there's not a more beautiful creature in the city."

"Do you really mean that? And is she a slave? Shouldn't we think her master would part with her?"

"Well, the truth is he is a poor devil—one Neal Jaffer who has served as Beauregard's spy, and he has to raise money. I mean to bid on the girl. But there is little chance of my being able to buy her."

"Why so?"

"Well, Cartona, the Cuban millionaire sugar planter, wants to purchase the girl, so Jaffers told me. He made a big offer for her. But Jaffers means to risk getting more for her at the auction block."

"There will be some lively bidding at the sale, I am thinking."

"What are the terms?"

"One-half cash down when the property is struck off, the balance on delivery of the same."

Ned and old Kemp, who had heard every word, looked each other in mute excitement.

Presently the two planters whose conversation they had overheard left the restaurant.

Old Kemp and Ned followed them.

The two rebels were not aware of the espionage.

The Unionists kept them in sight as they walked down the street. But the planters did not immediately conduct our friends to the slave market, though the latter had anticipated they might do so.

The planters stopped at several saloons, and afterward left the main street and turned into a gloomy alley.

At no great distance was a one-story frame building, which had originally been constructed for a tobacco warehouse.

But for some years the building had been used for the slave sales which took place in the city.

At the very time when the two Southern planters were approaching the slave market, the interior of that old structure, which had witnessed many a scene of human misery, presented a scene which is no longer possible in the free land.

The building was dimly lighted with oil lamps.

In the center was a square block, some four feet high, reached by steps, and placed beside it was the auctioneer's desk elevated to a level with the "sale-block."

One side of the building was divided into square pens, with railings in front of them, through which the human chattels in the inclosure could be seen.

But this night only one of those slave-pens was occupied, and the trade was dull, and there was little money in circulation in Petersburg.

A dozen blacks—men, women, and children—were huddled in one of the pens, and in the same space, but standing apart from the colored people, like a beautiful vision, stood a young white girl.

We need scarcely add that she was Mildred Hastings.

Perhaps thirty men were present. They were all of the wealthy class, and devoted to the beloved Southern institution of human slavery.

Among the spectators were a tall swarthy, saturnine man, resplendent in diamonds, whom the auctioneer and Neal Jaffers were speaking to with great respect.

This personage was Cartona—the wealthy Cuban planter—whom the rebel planter stated meant to buy the Union girl.

The auctioneer had just taken his place at his desk, and the sale was about to begin, when the two men to whose conversation Ned and old Kemp had listened in the restaurant entered the room.

A moment later the boy cavalry scout and Old Kemp also came in.

They had tracked the two planters close, and some good Union gold had bribed the doorkeeper to admit them without tickets.

Ned's heart beat like lightning as he saw Mildred—the girl he loved—led forth to the sales block, under the eyes of the vulgar crowd.

Pale as death looked the lovely Union girl. She saw Ned and old Kemp, but did not recognize them. With bowed head she stood upon the sale block, and the sale began.

The two Unionists had gained the inside of the slave market, but how were they to serve Mildred?

"How much am I offered? Who makes the first bid? Here is as fine a girl for a lady's maid as can be found in all the South!" cried the auctioneer.

"One thousand dollars!" cried the Cuban, glancing at Mildred in a way that made her shudder.

Everyone seemed to hesitate to bid against the Cuban, for he was reputed to be immensely wealthy, and also had the reputation of being a desperate duelist, ready to force a fight on anyone who angered him.

While the auctioneer repeated his bid, the Cuban said:

"I've made up my mind to buy that gal, gentlemen, I give you all warning."

"Twelve hundred dollars!" cried a clear young voice, as the auctioneer continued to dwell on the Cuban's bid.

The speaker was Ned Burton.

Neal Jaffers, at the sound of his voice, wheeled and stared at the boy. It was a moment of peril and suspense for Ned and old Kemp.

CHAPTER XVI.

USING UNION GOLD TO GOOD PURPOSE.

Old Kemp instinctively dropped his hands upon a pair of revolvers concealed in his coat pockets.

"The boy's voice has betrayed him. He is lost!" thought the veteran.

Ned shared the alarm of his friend, as he saw Neal Jaffers wheel and stare at him, as he raised the fierce-looking Cuban's bid for the beautiful "white slave."

But the rebel spy did not penetrate the disguise of the Union lad. The moustache and goatee, and the swarthy hue the coloring-matter had imparted to Ned's face, masked his identity even to the keen eyes of his enemy.

Ned maintained his composure admirably. He was ready to punish himself, for the oversight he had in the excitement of the moment been guilty of, in not disguising his tones.

The lad saw the fierce Cuban look at him threateningly, and heard him say as Jaffers turned to him:

"Diablo! The young fellow with the old planter will make an enemy of me. Does he think he can successfully bid against Cartona!"

Neal Jaffers smiled as he replied:

"You know, senor, that this is an auction sale, and open to all present."

Cartona shrugged his shoulders, and as the auctioneer began to repeat Ned's bid of twelve hundred dollars, the Cuban called out loudly:

"Two thousand dollars!"

As he raised Ned's offer by eight hundred dollars at a single bid, Cartona turned and glared at the disguised Union boy in a way that said as plainly as words could have done:

"Follow that, if you dare!"

Until that moment, since he first spoke aloud in the slave market, Ned had not dared to look at Mildred Hastings.

The lad feared that she, too, had made the recognition of his voice, and he knew that if she even by the slightest look or gesture signified that there was an acquaintance between them, Jaffers' suspicions would be aroused at once.

But his heart yearned to convey to the despairing girl an assurance that hidden friends were near intent upon rendering her assistance in that threatening moment of her terrible experience.

Without appearing to notice the insolent and menacing glances which the Cuban bestowed upon him, the lad finally lifted his eloquent eyes to the pale, sad face of the beautiful maiden on the slave block.

Instantly Ned's glance was withdrawn.

But he had met the glance of the glorious dark eyes of her who possessed his heart.

In that one flash of glances the mysterious telegraphy of the soul had conveyed intelligence from mind to mind, and Ned knew that Mildred Hastings had recognized him.

Faster beat the brave heart of the loyal youth, and his lips took a firmer line, while he was strengthened in his resolution to risk all to save his beloved.

And a shudder went through his nerves as he thought of Mildred in the power of the fierce, swarthy Cuban who meant to buy her with his slave-earned gold.

"No, no, I will outbid the Cuban. It is the only way in which I can defeat the wretch and withhold the fate that threatens Mildred," thought Ned.

Then he whispered to old Kemp, while the auctioneer went on in the usual way, repeating the Cuban's last bid, and appealing to his auditors for an advance offer.

"Old friend," said Ned, "I have five thousand dollars of the sum belonging to the federal government which Neal Jaffers stole from my murdered father."

"Right, boy. You have half the ten thousand we secured in the cellar of the old mansion, and I have the other half."

"The money is not ours, but we hold it in trust for the Union government, and I am sure the gold coin of a free country could never be put to better use than to ransom a loyal maiden from Southern bondage."

"Amen to that. Beat the black-faced feller biddin' fer the Union gal if it takes every dollar of Uncle Sam's gold we carry in our two little handbags. Redskins an' rattlesnakes, beat the varmint on biddin' if we hev to go broke," replied the veteran enthusiastically.

"I felt sure you would think as I do. I will bid the last dollar of the government gold to save Mildred."

"Come, come, gentlemen! Last call! Make your bids now, if at all. We cannot dwell all night on one offer. How much do I hear? Don't all speak at once. Well, well, this is a sacrifice! Only two thousand I'm offered for the likeliest gal in the South. Two thousand if it is! Two thousand once! Two thousand twice! Two thousand—" called out the auctioneer.

"Twenty-five hundred!" said Ned, quietly, and this time he disguised his clear, young voice by a thick, hoarse utterance.

"Thank you, sir. Thank you!" replied the auctioneer, taking up Ned's bid.

The Cuban scarcely waited for it to be called twice.

Then, while he strode near Ned, he shouted:

"Three thousand dollars!"

The excitement of the audience now became intense.

All saw that it was to be a struggle between the young planter and the Cuban. The sympathies of most of the men present were secretly with Ned, believing that he was a citizen of the Confederacy. But the terrible reputation Cartona bore kept all from showing that they favored Ned.

Neal Jaffers looked well pleased.

Anything that increased the price his girl captive brought in the slave market was perfectly satisfactory to the scoundrel.

A rather pleasant-looking man who stood near Ned took occasion to say to the lad in low tones when Cartona looked away:

"The Cuban is getting in a rage. He's set his heart on buying the girl, and he's likely to pick a quarrel and force you into a duel if you beat him in the bidding."

"Thanks for your friendly warning. I am not afraid. I am a Southern gentleman," said Ned, politically.

"And a chivalrous one I am sure," replied the stranger.

The succeeding moment Ned called out:

"Five thousand dollars!"

The auctioneer opened his eyes in surprise.

The Cuban's rage and astonishment showed itself in his expression of countenance, and Neal Jaffers rubbed his hands in delight.

"Diablo, sir! Do you mean to make this a personal matter? I mean to have that girl. Bid against me again, and I'll make you repent it!" cried the Cuban in a blustering tone, while he glared at Ned.

"This is an auction sale public to all present. I shall bid as long as I please, and no man shall dictate my conduct," replied Ned, firmly.

There was a murmur of admiration from the hot-headed Southern men present.

"You are only a boy, and I should dislike to kill you in the duello."

Then he strode towards the slave-block and cried in tones of triumph:

"I say six thousand dollars!"

"I'm afraid, lad, if that feller is the millionaire I just heard someone say he is, he will go beyond our pile. In that case, shill hev to kill him!" whispered old Kemp.

The trapper-scout of the Union spoke as calmly and in a matter-of-fact way as if alluding to the killing of a mad dog.

"I'll end the suspense, anyway," replied Ned, and then he said:

"Ten thousand dollars! I double the Cuban's bid! Let him raise me if he can!"

There was a moment of dead silence.

Even the auctioneer forgot to cry the bid.

Mildred clasped her hands as if in silent prayer, and the intense and suspenseful emotions she was experiencing were plainly written upon her features.

Cartona stood dumb for a space.

Then he turned livid, and a volley of Spanish oaths fell from his lips.

Everyone expected to hear him raise the young planter's bid.

But not so.

Cartona suddenly strode toward Ned. His eyes blazed. He clearly meditated violence. Suddenly he struck at the boy with a glove he had drawn from his hand.

Ned received the blow on his cheek.

The next instant the Cuban went down under a blow from Ned's first that came straight from the shoulder in the true American style.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRICE OF THE WHITE SLAVE.

In an instant the Cuban was upon his feet and, glaring at Ned fiercely, he put his hand behind him suddenly and drew a dagger.

But just then old Kemp seized his arm.

The veteran gave the Cuban's arm a twist and sent the knife from his grasp.

Cartona made a desperate effort, and controlled his rage for a measure.

But in hissing tones he cried, as he glared at Ned:

"I demand the satisfaction of the duello, Senor Americano!"

"You shall have it. That man is my friend, and he will be my second."

As Ned thus promptly accepted the challenge he indicated old Kemp.

"Order, gentlemen, order!" cried the manager of the slave market, coming forward with several of the employes of the place. "The sale must not be interrupted now."

Cartona stepped back and said to old Kemp:

"I will send my second to you directly, sir."

The scout nodded and the sale went on.

Mildred Hastings had experienced intense excitement during the thrilling scene we have just described. She uttered a half-stifled scream, as Cartona drew his dagger and seemed about to stab Ned.

At that moment of confusion the cry which was wrung from Mildred by her solicitude for Ned escaped the notice of Neal Jaffers.

When the auctioneer commenced loudly to cry the bid

ten thousand which Ned had last made, every eye was turned upon Cartona.

All present thought now he would baffle the young planter and secure the beautiful white girl by bidding a sum which would be beyond the reach of the latter.

But not so.

Cartona did not bid again.

A murmur of surprise went around the room as the auctioneer dwelt upon Ned's bid for the last time.

The auctioneer looked at Cartona, ready to accept the least nod or signal to raise the offer the Union boy had made.

But the Cuban turned his back.

"Ten thousand dollars for the third and last time, and sold to you—your name, please?" said the auctioneer, as Ned stepped to his desk.

"Garrison Peyton."

"Very good."

At that moment, with a wailing cry, unable longer to stand the great nervous strain to which she was being subjected, Mildred sank white and motionless upon the slave-block.

She had fainted.

A couple of colored women were called to revive her.

While they were thus engaged the auctioneer recorded the name Ned had given in his book, and made out a bill of sale.

"Will you pay in full and take possession of your property at once, or make half payment to bind the sale, and pay the balance on delivery of the girl?" asked the auctioneer.

"I will pay in full, here and now."

As Ned thus replied, the spectators, including the Cuban, looked at him with new respect.

In those days a man among the rebels who could command ten thousand dollars in gold was regarded as a veritable money king.

Ned coolly opened his traveling bag, which he had slung from his shoulder at his side, and counted out five thousand dollars.

Then old Kemp silently handed his bag up to the boy, and its contents were transferred to the auctioneer's desk.

Neal Jeffers' eyes gleamed with the light of avarice, as he gathered up the money and put it in a large metallic cash box to carry away.

The bill of sale, duly sealed, signed and witnessed, was handed to Ned.

Meantime old Kemp had been eyeing Neal Jeffers' cash box in a way that might have awakened fears for the safety of its contents in the villain's mind, had he observed the old scout.

But old Kemp was cunning enough to make his scrutiny in a covert, sly way, and no one appeared to particularly notice him.

When Ned had received the bill of sale, which, according to the law of the slave state, made Mildred his property, he turned toward the loyal maiden whom he meant to rescue.

Under the kindly hands of the two slave women she had now recovered from her fainting fit.

Ned was delighted to observe this, and, giving her a warning glance, he was about to address her, when Cartona strode forward and said:

"I have obtained the consent of the owner of the slave market that we may fight a duello here, and now, what say you? address myself directly to you, senor, rather than to your cond, because I would hear my answer in your own words. Are you afraid to fight me now?"

"Certainly not. Now as well as any time. And in the presence of all these Southern gentlemen I am sure I shall have my play."

"Diablo! You further insult me by the hint that I would be at an unfair advantage."

"What did you draw your dagger for then, merely to look at the weapon, I suppose?" sneered Ned.

"Enough! I shall have your blood."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Cartona has fought a score of duels, and no man who has faced him lives to tell of it."

"You can't bluff me, old chap, if that's what you are trying for," replied Ned.

He really wished to make the Cuban as angry as possible, for he knew the more excited he became the less likely he would be to win in the duel.

It was still a mystery to everyone why Cartona had not raised Ned's bid.

But this was soon explained.

All at once a deputy sheriff entered the slave market and served Cartona with a legal-looking paper.

Some of the men questioned the officer as he was going out.

Ned and old Kemp heard the man state that Cartona, who had been a blockade runner since the war, plying between his Cuban plantation and Charleston, had recently been almost financially ruined by the loss of a number of expensive vessels he owned, that had been captured by the Yankee cruisers. Cartona had kept the fact of his financial difficulties a secret in Petersburg.

The papers with which he had been served were writs issued in civil suits by Southern creditors of the Cuban's.

The truth seemed to be indicated that Cartona was unable to raise Ned's bid for want of the funds to make it good.

As soon as the officer, who might have interfered with the proposed duel, had he known it was contemplated, had gone the center of the market was cleared.

The auctioneer, at the request of the boy scout, paced off the distance of eight paces which the duelists agreed upon.

Then they faced each other.

Neal Jeffers had been sent by Cartona for a pair of dueling pistols. He returned in a few moments, and then Cartona said:

"My friend here will load the two weapons in the presence of all."

He indicated a silent, little dark-visaged man who had kept close to him all the evening.

The weapons were placed side by side.

Ned chose one. The Cuban took the other.

Then the little man carefully loaded the weapons.

All seemed fair. But really black treachery was at work. Cartona had given the little man a secret signal.

The little dark man did not put any bullet in Ned's pistol, though he seemed to do so.

He handed the weapons to the duelists.

They stood waiting to fire at the signal, which the auctioneer was to give.

It seemed that Ned Burton was doomed to be shot down in cold-blooded murder, without a chance for his life, though the slave market duel had so many witnesses.

Old Kemp had failed to detect the treachery of the old man who had loaded the weapons.

But suddenly a scream pealed through the gloomy old building, and Mildred Hastings rushed between the duelists.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HEMMED IN BY THE ENEMY.

"Hold!" cried Mildred in ringing tones, as she struck up the pistol of the Cuban. "Hold, I say! There is no bullet in this man's weapon. I detected the treacherous villain who loaded the pistol when he dropped the bullet in the sawdust, and here it is!"

Mildred had indicated Ned as the man whose weapon was not loaded.

As she spoke the last words she stooped quickly and picked up a pistol ball.

A murmur of indignation went up from the crowd, and the little scoundrel who had failed to load Ned's weapon made a dash and escaped from the room before anyone could stop him.

The boy cavalry scout cried in threatening tones:

"This is your work, villain!"

"No, no," replied the Cuban.

"Well, you shall fight fairly now," continued Ned, as one of the spectators came forward and volunteered to load his weapon properly.

The Cuban looked uneasy, but he said:

"Very well, Senor Americano, Cartona will kill you."

Ned gave Mildred a look of gratitude, and, turning to her, he said, to keep up his character:

"My good girl, you have saved my life. I am glad I bought you, and my mother will be a kind mistress. You shall be well treated on my plantation in the South."

Mildred bowed and turned away in silence.

Ned's pistol was quickly reloaded.

Again the duelists faced each other, and, after a moment, which was a period of breathless suspense for the Union girl and old Kemp, the word to fire was pronounced.

Almost simultaneously two reports rang out.

For an instant both duelists were seen standing.

Then Cartona reeled and would have fallen had not two men sprang forward and caught him in their arms.

"I'll have your life yet for that shot, accursed Americano," said Cartona, in fierce, though faint tones, as his pistol fell to the floor.

The surgeon was called in from the next block, and he said the Cuban was badly wounded in the shoulder.

Meanwhile Ned and Mildred, accompanied by old Kemp, quietly left the slave market.

But they had not been gone long when the auctioneer came to Jaffers and said:

"Let's have a look at that gold again—I mean the money the young planter paid for the gal."

"What do you want to see the money for?"

"It has just occurred to me it may not be all right."

"Why so?"

"Because I begin to suspect there is something wrong about the young planter."

"What do you mean?"

"I didn't want to get in trouble with the young planter, but I think he is in disguise."

"What causes you to have such a suspicion?"

"His goatee came off as he went out. It dropped to the floor, and he had to stoop to pick it up. I was the only one now present who saw him, I think."

"Good heavens! the gold may be counterfeit."

"Yes."

"I'll open the money box at once."

Neal Jaffers hastened to do so.

A pair of scales, such as are used for weighing gold, were produced by the auctioneer, and by means of them the two men, much to the relief of Jaffers, found that the gold was good coin.

Meantime, Jaffers was reflecting.

He asked himself why the young planter had appeared in the slave market in disguise.

Could it be that he really was other than he seemed?

The recollection suddenly returned to the mind of Neal Jaffers that there had been something strangely familiar in the voice of the young planter when he first spoke in the slave market.

"Where have I heard that voice?" he said mentally.

For a brief space he vainly sought to remember to what that voice had belonged.

But all at once he exclaimed in intense excitement:

"By heavens, I have it. That voice was that of Ned Burdett, the Yankee boy cavalry scout."

The rebel spy was thrilled by the magnitude of the discovery he thought he had made.

But he meant to make doubly sure he was right, and, having had the gold locked up in the great safe of the slave market, he hastened from the building.

Neal Jaffers made his way straight to the headquarters of the marshal in command of the rebel city.

He was immediately granted an audience, and in a few words he made known the object of his call.

"General," said he. "I am satisfied that one of Grant's spies is in Petersburg in disguise, and I would like you to place a squad of men under my orders to make a special search for the Yankee."

The general gladly assented to this.

Then Neal Jaffers gave an accurate description of Ned, and it was taken down in writing.

"I shall send out a general alarm, and have all the pickets about the city on the alert to prevent the escape of the spy from the city. He must be taken dead or alive. A liberal reward shall be offered for him. If he escapes he will call to the Yankees the news of how really weak we are here," said the commanding officer.

"Certainly," returned Jaffers. "The escape of the Yankee spy would be a great calamity to the South."

The soldiers he had asked for were immediately placed at his disposal, and while he set out with them to search for Ned, the general alarm the officer had spoken of was sent out by couriers to all the pickets about the city.

Though the boy cavalry scout was ignorant of the fact, it now seemed that his escape from Petersburg was cut off. That he and his friends were hemmed in by foes.

Meantime, Ned was ignorant that suspicion had been aroused against him in the least.

He and Mildred had gone hastily away from the old slave market as soon as they had passed its gloomy portals.

But old Kemp had remained behind.

The Union scout agreed to meet Ned and Mildred again later at a deserted farmhouse in the outskirts of the city, which the Unionists had found when they were out examining the rebel earthworks.

There they proposed to remain for a time and perfect their plans for the future.

Ned's old friend whispered something to him which the young girl did not understand when he proposed to remain behind.

The truth was old Kemp had declared his intention of going to locate what place Jaffers might transfer the gold to.

With his band of rebel man-hunters Neal Jaffers hastened to seek Ned's trail.

The villain came back to the slave market and began to make inquiries along the alley and the adjacent street.

Soon he got the clues he needed, and, by continuing his inquiries, tracked Ned and the Union girl to the suburban city.

An old rebel who had lost his arm at the battle of Bull Run and who was especially bitter against all Unionists, occupied a cabin near the deserted farmhouse.

He had seen Ned and Mildred pass his cabin, for the rebel loyal lad and the imperiled maiden had already entered the deserted house.

The one-armed man had watched them from the window of his cabin, and seen them enter the house in question.

had been no light in the old fellow's hut that night, and Ned had not suspected that, at that time, there was anyone astir in it.

"We shall have the Union spy now. Forward, men, and surround the house. If the Yank tries to get off shoot him down in his tracks," said Jaffers, when he had received the information the one-armed man had to give.

Unconscious of the approaching peril, Ned and the Union maiden were awaiting the coming of old Kemp, when they were startled by hearing someone stealthily try the front door which Ned had secured. The next moment Neal Jaffers' voice rang out as he commanded:

"Open in the name of the Confederacy!"

CHAPTER XIX.

OLD KEMP AFTER THE UNION GOLD.

Old Kemp, after the departure of Ned and Mildred Hastings, remained near the old slave market, in which the Union girl had been sold to the highest bidder.

The veteran Union scout watched the door of the slave market, noting every one who passed out, and when Neal Jaffers left the building old Kemp was convinced that the arch Southern villain did not carry the Union gold, which had been paid as the price of a human being, with him.

"Ha! The critter hez left the good Union money in the slave market. I shouldn't wonder if I could guess where it is? I didn't use my eyes for nothing when I was inside," muttered old Kemp, when Neal Jaffers had passed out of sight.

"Redskins an' rattlesnakes! It would be a cryin' shame to leave that ten thousand dollars in the hands o' the pizen b'bs, an' I don't mean they shall have it. No. If I kin open the big safe I noticed in the slave market before daylight I'll stagger the Union gold will never do the pizen traitors any good," the old scout continued to reflect.

He had used his eyes to good purpose while in the slave market, and carefully noted everything there.

We know he had hit upon the truth, regarding the Union gold, for the auctioneer of the slave market had locked the money up in the safe at Neal Jaffer's request, as the reader will remember.

"I reckon I'll hev to work mighty cunnin', jist as if I had sneak into a camp of redskins to free a prisoner, in order to get at the safe without discovery, fer I'm afraid there will be someone in the slave market all night," further reflected old Kemp.

The trapper scout was not aware of the fact, of course, but that moment a great danger was approaching him.

One of the rebel night-patrol was creeping along the alley, and stealing stealthily toward the disguised scout from Gen. Grant's army.

From the window of an adjacent building the night-patrol detected old Kemp crouching in the shadows on the porch, near the slave market.

The rebel was a shrewd fellow, and the manner of the old scout convinced him the latter was playing the part of a

vague suspicion crossed the mind of the patrolman that there was something wrong, and he meant to surprise the scout in the alley, and compel him to give an account of him-

Old Kemp was so intent upon watching the door of the slave market that he did not once look behind him.

The patrolman moved silently as possible.

Acute as was the sense of hearing of the trapper-scout, he failed to hear the approach of the patrol.

Nearer and nearer came the Confederate.

He was soon close to old Kemp, and then he raised his rifle and took aim at the back of the old Union scout's crouching figure.

Suddenly then, when all the advantage was on his side, the patrolman spoke.

His voice rang out clear and sharp, as he demanded:

"Who are you, my man, and what are you doing there?"

Old Kemp started as if he had been shot, and faced about with the greatest possible alacrity.

He saw the rebel.

And he looked into the deadly tube that was leveled at his heart.

The old scout had sprang erect.

He did not lose his presence of mind.

The disguise of a well-to-do Southern planter he still relied upon to shield him, although he had fallen under suspicion.

"I beg your pardon, sah! I'm Jefferson Peyton, sah, of South Plantation, North Kerlina, sah. Sat down to rest, sah. Been dining, and I reckon, sah, your Petersburg wine was a trifle too strong, sah."

Old Kemp's dialect and manner was admirable. He played his part excellently. The rebel scanned him closely, under the moonlight, as he lowered his gun.

The disguise, to which the veteran of the Union army had intrusted his life, could not have been more perfect.

It was a moment of breathless suspense for old Kemp, while the rebel stood and stared at him in silence.

But the veteran seemed as unconcerned as possible.

Coolly drawing a cigar-case from his pocket, he lighted a weed, and proffered the case to the rebel.

That seemed to settle the doubts regarding the scout, if, indeed, the rebel had any. He accepted the cigar Old Kemp tendered him, and said:

"All right, stranger. I reckon you fell asleep here. You best go to your hotel now, for the city patrol is pretty alert nowadays, and if you don't look out you'll get taken to the marshal's office."

"Thank you, sah. I'll look out, sah. Of course, sah, I don't want to get into trouble. But I'm a Southern gentleman, sah."

"No doubt of that. Good-night."

"Good-night, sah."

Old Kemp walked in one direction.

The patrol walked in the opposite course.

As soon as the rebel was out of sight the old scout retraced his steps.

Having returned to the slave market he concealed himself among some sugar barrels that stood beside it.

It was well he hid himself thus, for in a few moments the patrol came stealthily by again.

After the guard once more passed out of sight, the Union scout remained in hiding until the slave market was deserted by all save two night watchmen and a negro, as he gathered from the conversation of the two former.

Old Kemp heard them conversing as they closed up the market, and gathered that the negro was one of the lot of slaves offered for sale, but that no one had been found to purchase him, on account of his reputation as a dangerous character.

After midnight old Kemp, undetected by either of the two watchmen, who were asleep inside the building, succeeded in making an entrance through a small window.

Having gained the interior of the market, the old scout, almost immediately, located the position of the two guards by their heavy breathing.

The next thing he felt he had to do was to silence them.

With ten thousand dollars at stake, which sum he felt might yet be needed to save more than one precious life, before he and the boy cavalry scout returned to the Union lines with the Union girl, who had been condemned to slavery—old Kemp did not hesitate.

Like a serpent—so silent and swift—he glided to the sleeping guards. They were lying side by side.

Suddenly the veteran dealt two swift and heavy blows with his clubbed revolver.

Both were knocked senseless before they awoke, for the scout knew where to aim his blows.

Working swiftly, old Kemp bound and gagged the rebels.

When he had completed the task he was turning toward the great safe, which contained the treasure that had been stolen from Ned Burton's father.

At that critical moment a dark form, that had stolen close upon the old Unionist undetected, leaped at his throat.

CHAPTER XX.

THE UNION SCOUT RECOVERS THE TREASURE.

By the faint light of a single oil-lamp that burned dimly in the old slave market, old Kemp saw that his assailant was a giant negro.

Instantly the scout remembered what he had heard the watchman say about the one slave that remained in the market.

Then the Unionist knew he was in the clutches of the negro, for whom no purchaser could be found, because of his reputation as a desperate character.

But it had been the experience of the scout that the slaves everywhere and in every instance were the friends of the Union soldiers.

Struggling desperately with the black giant who had pounced upon him, old Kemp hastened to say:

"Hold, I am a friend. Hold, I say."

But the giant black only uttered a fierce exclamation.

Deceived by old Kemp's disguise, and having recognized him as the seeming planter, who was present at the slave sale, the negro evidently desperately intent upon making his escape, clearly meant to kill the man whom he believed stood between him and freedom.

"I am a Union man in disguise," continued old Kemp.

Just then his wig and beard came off.

It had become loosened in the struggle between him and the giant black.

The negro saw that the man he had assailed was not what he seemed. He hesitated in the struggle. Old Kemp took advantage of his chance.

He suddenly wrenched himself free from the hold of the slave.

Then, like a flash, he leveled his revolver at him.

"Don't shoot, massa! Don't shoot!" cried the slave.

"I don't mean to if you stand your ground. Now, then, git yer wits to work, if you got any. Didn't yer see me knock the two rebs here on the head? Of course you did. Durn yer skin, would I do that if I was one o' their sort? Not much! I'm one of Abe Lincoln's men, nig, an' I'm a givin' myself away to you because I know the darkies all over the South are true to the Union."

Old Kemp spoke so earnestly, and the circumstances were so completely corroborative of his assertion, that the poor slave was convinced.

"De good God bress you, sah. 'Deed, I'se glad to hear dat you am one ob Marse Linkum's men, fo' I know you will help a poor slave. I'se bound to get away up Norff. I'se bound

to jine Massa Linkum's sogers or die. I done thought meant to stop me, an' I was a-goin' ter kill yer."

"That's all right. I'd a-done the same in your place. Now what's your name?"

"Dan Jefferson."

"All right, Dan; you jist harness yourself to one o' guards' guns and revolvers and stand watch while I git work to blow open the reb's safe."

"Praise de Lawd. Is you gwine ter 'splode gunpowder yere?"

"Yes."

"Dat won't do. De noise will bring the guard yere on double quick, sah. Dar's plenty ob dem rebel sogers on de in de street at night."

"But I'm bound to open that safe. I'll fix it so the explosion won't be loud. But on second thought you an' I will get into the togs of the two rebels."

While the officer went on to explain his plans further and the darky exchanged their garments for the Confederate uniform worn by the two watchmen of the slave-market.

They then concealed the insensible men in a little room.

"I'se a-gwine to stick to yer, Massa Linkum man," said the poor slave. "I'se lookin' to you to lead me to freedom, like de wise men ob de East, what de good book ob, looked to de Star of Bethlehem to lead dem," said the slave earnestly.

"I mean to take you with me back to the Union lines, I Yes, I'm a-goin' to do that. Rattlesnakes an' redskins. now to work," replied old Kemp.

While the slave stood guard at the door with the musket at his shoulder, the Union scout went to the safe.

It was an old-fashioned one. Old Kemp produced a torch from a case he carried, and set it under the door. A moment later he fixed a train of powder and sent a serpent of flashing to the torpedo.

There was a dull, rumbling explosion. The door of the safe flew open.

Old Kemp sprang forward, and in the safe he found thousand dollars in Union gold.

He emptied the precious contents of the safe into the sack he had taken from the guard, and which he now strapped on his back.

He and Dan were about to go when they heard a rap on the door.

"Hide, Dan, and leave the rest to me," he said, pointing to the door of the little side room, in which the two Confederates he had bound and gagged were concealed.

Dan took the hint instantly, and glided through the inner door.

Then the scout, with his gun at his shoulder, opened the door, saying gruffly:

"What's the row?"

A couple of rebel soldiers were at the door. In the gloom they could not see the face of the scout distinctly. They were deceived by the uniform he had appropriated.

One of them said:

"We heard a report like an explosion from in here."

"Oh, no. I reckon you heard what I heard. It sounded like a blast, and the report seemed to come from the side of the market," promptly replied the scout.

"That's queer. I could have sworn the sound came in here. Waal, Dick, let's look around back of the market. Maybe there is something wrong."

Thus replying, the spokesman of the rebels withdrew his companions.

A moment later, carrying the Union gold he had so bravely recovered, the scout and the colored man were gliding away. They walked swiftly, carrying their guns in soldierly

and old Kemp directed his course in the direction of the deserted house which had been agreed upon as the trysting place where he was to meet the boy cavalry scout and Mildred.

Though he was entirely ignorant of the fact that Ned had fallen under suspicion, and that a general alarm had been sent out for the boy cavalry scout of the Union, old Kemp proceeded with great caution, for he was afraid of being backed.

Once or twice the scout and his comrade were met by rebel soldiers, but they were not questioned.

Evidently they were taken for members of the patrol looking for the boy scout of the Union.

At length old Kemp and Dan reached the neighborhood of the deserted house in which we left Ned and Mildred in deadly peril.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HUNTED LOVERS AND THEIR FOES.

When Neal Jaffers' thrilling demand, "Open in the name of the Confederacy!" reached the hearing of the boy cavalry scout and Mildred, as their arch enemy battered upon the barred door of the deserted house, in which the hunted Union couple had found refuge, the consternation of the latter may be imagined.

"Merciful heavens!" cried Mildred, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, "our foe has found us out!"

"It seems so. Oh, cruel fate! Would that old Kemp was here," replied Ned.

As he spoke he drew a revolver in each hand, and Mildred saw his lips take a firm line, while his eyes flashed.

"What do you mean to do?" cried the trembling girl.

"I mean to save you or die with you," came the determined answer of the boy hero.

The succeeding moment the rebels without made a furious attack on the door that stood between them and the human prey they were hunting.

"Ned," said Mildred, "let us seek a hiding-place in the house. Is there no place of concealment in which we may possibly elude the search of the enemy?"

"I know of none."

The door seemed about to fall.

Obedying an impulse, Mildred glided through an interior door.

Ned closed it behind her, and standing with his back against it, leveled his revolvers at the outer portal.

The assaulted door went down with a crash the next moment.

The rebels crowded into the house.

Neal Jaffers was in the lead.

At the sight of Ned he exclaimed:

"Ha! caught at last! We'll soon see under your disguise, pretender, and if we don't unmask a Yankee spy you may not me."

The Union boy was desperate, and he would have immediately inaugurated a fight that could scarcely have ended otherwise than fatally to himself. But as he was about to fire a thrilling scream uttered by Mildred reached him. Wheeling like a flash, and thinking only that the girl he loved was in peril, Ned tore open the door at his back.

At the same instant a half dozen men leaped upon him, and he was borne to the floor.

Jaffers rushed into the interior room. But he found it empty. He had recognized Mildred's voice, however, and he was sure she was in the house.

Calling two of his men he started to explore the premises, in search of the maiden.

Meanwhile, Ned's disguise was removed by the rebels who had overpowered him, and he was bound hand and foot.

The rebel spy came back after a vain search for Mildred, swearing viciously. He paused as he saw and recognized Ned's undisguised face.

"So our suspicions were correct! At last, Ned Burton, you are in my power!" cried Jaffers, as he glanced at the Union boy.

Ned did not reply. He believed that the thrilling drama of his life was nearly played to the end, but he would not allow his foe to see his despair.

"Now, then, you infernal Yank, tell me what has become of the girl? The house is surrounded. She could not have left it unseen by my men. There must be some secret hiding-place in which she is concealed," said Jaffers.

"I know of none," replied the Union boy.

"You lie! You mean the girl shall escape me. But she shall not! There is a secret of this house, I say, and you know it! By Heaven, you shall be compelled to divulge the truth," hissed Jaffers.

"I tell you, Neal Jaffers, I am as ignorant as you are regarding what you wish to know. You are assuming too much. Suppose I tell you Mildred Hastings was not here. You have heard of ventriloquism. Well, suppose you have been duped by an exhibition of my ventriloquial powers," said Ned.

"That won't do. You can't make me swallow any such nonsense! Boys, put a noose around his neck. We'll hang him or he shall tell the secret of the old house," said Jaffers.

A rope was produced and a hangman's noose was placed about Ned's neck.

Neal Jaffers was about to give the order to swing the brave Union boy up, for the rope had been thrown over a raft in the unplastered room, when the door of the room into which Mildred had retreated and from which she had mysteriously vanished was dashed open.

Mildred herself sprang forth.

Rushing to Ned's side she threw the noose from his neck before the rebels could stay her hands.

"Ho, ho! So I brought you from your hiding-place, my beauty?" cried Jaffers, in tones of triumph.

As he spoke Ned made a forward leap and snatched a revolver from the belt of one of the rebels. Then, whirling Mildred into a corner, he leveled the weapon he had secured at his foe, while he stood before the girl protectingly.

"Stand back!" thundered the heroic Union lad. "I mean to fight to the very death now, and I hold more than one of your lives at my mercy while I have this weapon."

As Ned spoke there sounded a volley of shots from outside the house. The next instant a throng of black-faced men surged into the room.

"Kill the niggers!" cried Jaffers.

Pistols cracked; there were shouts and yells; the air became heavy with powder smoke.

Mildred sank half fainting upon the floor, well nigh overcome with terror.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LEAGUE OF THE BLACK MEN.

As old Kemp and the loyal ducky who was seeking to escape to the Union lines approached the deserted house a singular circumstance transpired.

All at once a shrill call like that of a nightbird rang out. The sound emanated from a clump of trees at the roadside.

The suburban locality was but thinly settled, and clumps of trees abounded.

Old Kemp heeded not the cry, which he attributed to a bird.

But Dan paused the instant the peculiar sound reached his hearing.

The darky gave a violent start as he came to an abrupt standstill.

Looking at his face under the moonlight, the veteran scout saw it was transformed by a new expression.

Hope and joy was depicted upon the countenance of the loyal black man.

Observing this, old Kemp began to suspect that the call that was such an excellent imitation of a nightbird's cry was a call that had a hidden meaning.

This supposition became almost a certainty in the mind of old Kemp, as the ensuing moment the darky answered the call.

Dan repeated the cry of the nightbird exactly as it had sounded from the trees.

"Ha! As I thought. The darky knew that cry was a signal," muttered old Kemp.

Then to Dan:

"What is it, boy?"

"De call ob de black man's league."

"What is that?"

"It's bound by oath nebber to tell. But Union folks don't count in de oath. So I'll done tole yer, Mars Linkum's man."

"Well, speak out."

"You done hear tell ob de underground railroad 'fo de war?"

"Yes. By the underground railroad was meant a secret route by which slaves were helped to escape to Canada and the North."

"Dat's it!"

"Honest white men, who didn't believe one man was made to be the slave of another, lived all along the route."

"Glory! you knows all about it."

"And those honest fellers jist smuggled the runaway slaves along, from one to another, until these poor devils are safe beyond the reach of their masters."

"De good Lawd bress dem men!"

"Rattlesnakes an' redskins, yes!"

"Well, sah, the truff am, de brack man's league am a secret society among de niggers."

"Yes."

"Course I knows dem."

"Then why haven't you cut sticks afore this?"

"Case I was 'spected, an' old mars put me in chains an' kept me close till he done sent me to de slave market to be sold 'way down Souf."

"But now, Dan, I reckon we hev got to git out of the rebel country by the underground railway, if we get clear at all. Redskins and rattlesnakes, yes!"

"Dat's so; but har comes one ob de men ob de brack man's league."

Old Kemp saw a stalwart negro advancing from the clump of trees whence the secret signal of the slaves had sounded.

"Do you know that man?" asked old Kemp, a trifle apprehensively.

"'Deed I do. Dat man am my own brother, sah."

"Then surely he is to be trusted."

"Yes, sah."

Dan stepped forward as he spoke and shook hands with the strange colored man warmly.

Then the two slaves conversed in low tones.

For some moments they continued their conversation.

Then Dan stepped back to old Kemp.

"'Deed to goodness, sah, we is in great luck. De society am meetin' to-night in de ole mill under de hill down yender beyend the trees," said Dan.

"Well, I'll go on with you to the deserted home up t road, where I hope to find my friends, and then, if the c ored folks can send a guide with us, we'll try ter pass t pickets of ther Johnnies and make our way north by the u derground route."

At that moment a man was seen coming on a run.

He approached from the direction of the deserted house.

Old Kemp raised his rifle.

"Dat man am Jubal Kane, a friend!" exclaimed Dan.

The next moment old Kemp saw the man was a negro. I came up hastily and said:

"Fo' de Lawd, dar am some good Union folks in trouble de ole house up dar; I done saw de rebs dar. Da done su round de house an' call on somebody inside to surrender."

"Redskins an' rattlesnakes, my friends are found out. Con I'll not go back on 'em now if I lose my scalp!" cried o Kemp.

He started forward as he spoke.

"Hole on, dar, white man! Hole on, I told yer!" said D seizing the scout's arm.

Then to the negro who had just come up.

"How many rebs am dar there, Nick?"

"Big crowd, an' dat Cap Jaffers am wid 'em."

"Neal Jaffers! Ned's deadly foe!" cried old Kemp.

"Jubal, fotch de boys frum de mill. Now am de time f all han's to strike for liberty. De guns am stored in de cell ob de mill. Let all han's arm and come on to de rescue Mars Linkum's folks," said Dan.

"Yes, we'll do dat. Word come from de colored han's on Magnolia to-night. De boys was goin' fer de James river s liberty 'fore de break ob day, anyhow," said Jubal, and darted away.

In a few moments he returned with the men of the secret league of the slaves of Petersburg.

They numbered a score and all were armed.

Old Kemp meanwhile had asked for an explanation Jubal's last remarks.

Dan stated that the Magnolia was a small steamer in t service of the Confederacy on the James river, near Ric mond.

The boat was manned by colored men mostly, and they w members of the slave league.

A plot had long been hatching among the secret league the slaves to seize the little steamer and run her north the river to a point near the Union outposts.

Led by old Kemp, the little band of black men, who mea to escape from bondage, advanced toward the deserted hou

CHAPTER XXIII.

THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINES.

When Mildred uttered the scream that fell from her li after she rushed into the interior room of the deserted hou her cry was intended to call Ned.

Terror lent her voice its shrill intonations.

She had accidentally made a great discovery.

Stumbling against a panel of broken wainscoting, she f it yield, and a secret door was disclosed.

Mildred sprang through it.

The door closed as she stepped through it, for her welg worked a lever connected with the floor on the inside of t door.

Thus it was the hunted Union girl so mysteriously va ished.

We have seen how she rushed forth into the presence of h foes.

She had heard Jaffers' cruel threat to hang Ned.
The devoted girl could not let him meet his death to insure her concealment.

The old Union scout and his colored band arrived at the deserted house just after Mildred threw the rope from off the neck of the boy cavalry scout.

Then they charged the rebels, who surrounded the deserted house.

A short conflict ensued.

Every man of the rebel band outside the house fell under the bullets of the desperate blacks who were battling for freedom.

It was the force under old Kemp that charged into the house and continued the conflict there.

The veteran scout was among the men of the slave secret league.

But in the confusion Ned and Mildred did not see him.

But they felt that the black men who so furiously attacked the rebels were friends.

Seeing the strife going against him, Jaffers leaped through a window and fled.

The arch villain seemed to bear a charmed life that night. He was the only one of the band who made good his escape.

All the others were either wounded or killed.

Old Kemp reached the side of Ned as Jaffers fled.

While several of the colored men darted in pursuit of the escaping rebel, the veteran scout hurried Ned and Mildred out of the house.

Guided by Dan and attended by the band of blacks, they set out for the woods north of Petersburg.

As they went along the old scout explained the situation to the young lovers.

When they had heard all, they could but admit that it seemed a special Providence was at work in their behalf.

They had found friends to help them in the stronghold of the enemy when they least expected them.

The brave blacks were to be relied upon the trio knew, for had not their conduct already proven that?

The black leaguers had their plans well matured.

They knew the location of all the rebel picket stations around the Confederate city.

Now it was their purpose to guide their white friends by the outposts of their foes.

The knowledge the blacks had of the country was also to be considered of the greatest value.

Old Kemp and Ned conversed in low tones as they hurried along with Mildred between them.

They knew Jaffers would give the alarm, and that no doubt the sound of the skirmish at the old house had already called the rebels that way to learn the cause of the firing.

The Unionists knew that they would be pursued, and that every effort would be made to cut off their escape and run them down.

The night grew darker as they went on.

They were just entering the shelter of the woods north of the rebel city, when Ned cried, as he pointed in the direction of Petersburg:

"See! See! The enemy is sending up signal rockets!"

All looked back and saw it was as Ned said.

Balls of colored fire were seen to shoot gracefully up into the sky and explode.

"That means the varmints are notifying their most distant tickets to be on the lookout," said old Kemp.

The escaping party plunged into the woods.

Led by Dan, who seemed sure of the route, they went straight on for some distance.

But finally their course was changed due west.

"We am strikin' fer de river now," then said Dan.

And he added:

De Magnolia steamer am at 'Long Warf' to-night, out of range of the biggest batteries. Dar we must capture de boat."

"It's a desperate undertaking," said Mildred.

"But it is our only chance. We must take the steamer or be captured and carried back to our doom," replied Ned.

On and still on hurried the fugitives.

Presently Dan announced:

"We have now left the last rebel picket in de rear, an' we didn't go near him. De brack men are almost out ob slavery."

The poor slaves sent up a murmur of earnest thanksgiving as they heard the words of their leader.

But they did not pause.

The pace the fugitives had thus far maintained told upon Mildred's power of endurance.

But Ned and old Kemp each gave her a hand and struggled on.

The thought that she was fleeing from a fate worse than death inspired the brave Union girl.

She seemed gifted with strength to meet the present trying ordeal, and she sought not to become too great a burden to her friends.

The way to the James river seemed a weary journey.

The distance traversed was great because of the necessity of eluding the rebel pickets, which had hired the guide to lead his followers far from the right course.

But at length the sound of running waters were heard ahead.

A colored guide then halted and crept forward to reconnoiter, instructing his companions to await his return.

Dan was absent twenty minutes or more.

"De good Lawd am watchin' ober us. De Magnolia am at de warf, an' I done gib de colored boys de signal," announced Dan.

Then the party advanced and presently came upon the levee beside the river. There was a straggling hamlet, and at a little wharf the rebel boat "The Magnolia" was tied up.

"Forward!" cried Ned, and the party made a dash to board the vessel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAPTURE OF THE MAGNOLIA—CONCLUSION.

The Magnolia was a small sidewheeler, used as supply boat, plying up and down the James, carrying provisions and forage to the rebel capital from the upper valley, which yet remained in the hands of the rebels.

The vessel was officered by white men, and the engineer was a rank Confederate.

All the deckhands and stokers were blacks.

The slaves were ready for the coming of their friends.

The white officers were overpowered and made prisoners without firing a shot.

Then the chains were cast off and the vessel became adrift.

Leaving Mildred in a cabin, Ned and old Kemp descended to the engine-room, while the pilot—a darky of the secret league—stood at the wheel.

The rebel engineer met the Union scout at the door of the engine-room.

The fellow had a revolver in each hand.

"Stand, or I fire!" he cried, upon beholding the two Union scouts.

"Hold on!" said old Kemp. "We have captured the boat. The Yankees have taken Petersburg. The niggers want to kill you, but I've promised to save your life—on conditions——"

The veteran looked very serious.

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